

Israel arrests three brothers

HEBRON (AFP) — Israeli troops on Wednesday arrested three Palestinian brothers in their house near Hebron in the south of the West Bank, Palestinian sources said. The soldiers entered the house of Tayseer Muhammed El Awawidah, 30, and his brothers Azzam, 28, and Aziz, 20, in the village of Karma in the early hours of Wednesday morning and took them to a detention centre, the sources said. No reason for the arrests was given but sources in Karma confirmed that Azzam had previously been arrested for membership of the militant Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). Karma falls in an area of the occupied Palestinian territories where Israel retains complete control over civil and military affairs.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية والراي

Happy New Year

THE JORDAN TIMES will not be published on Saturday, Jan. 2, 1999, on account of the New Year holiday. The next issue of the newspaper will appear on Sunday, Jan. 3, 1999. The newspaper wishes its readers and advertisers a very prosperous and happy New Year.

Volume 24 Number 7033

AMMAN THURSDAY-FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1998-JANUARY 1, 1999, RAMADAN 13-14, 1419

Price: Jordan 200 fils

Israeli soldier killed by friendly fire

TEL AVIV (AP) — An Israeli soldier was killed and two were wounded before dawn Wednesday when one Israeli army unit mistakenly opened fire on another in southern Lebanon, an army commander said. The two units had started out together on a patrol in Israel's self-declared security zone in Lebanon, but were later separated when one group lost its way. "The rear unit separated from the front forces and mistakenly thought they were terrorists," Brig. Gen. Eitan said. "The rear force opened fire on the front force, and as a result of this, people were hurt." Eitan said the rear unit had requested and received permission from the base commander to open fire.

New nations take seats in Security Council

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Canada, Malaysia, Namibia, the Netherlands and Argentina become members on Friday of the prestigious 15-member United Nations Security Council for two-year terms. The council has 10 non-permanent members, five of which rotate each year, and five veto-bearing permanent members — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China. The new members replace Costa Rica, Japan, Kenya, Portugal and Sweden whose two-year terms expire on Thursday. Five other non-permanent members still on the council for another year are Brazil, Gabon, Gambia, Slovenia and Bahrain. Brazil's ambassador, Celso L.N. Amorim, takes over for the council presidency from the month of January from Jassim Mohammod Bualay of Bahrain. The presidency rotates monthly, according to the English alphabet.

Police catch robbery suspect red-handed

WILMINGTON (AP) — A bank robbery suspect was literally caught red-handed after giving a friendly wave to a police officer. A man robbed a bank Tuesday and fled on a bicycle, abandoning it after a dye pack inserted with the money exploded, police said. Minutes later, police arrested Cayenne Brown after he stepped from an apartment building vestibule and waved to a police officer he knew. "The officer noticed his hands were fluorescent orange and just put two and two together," Lt. Sean Finerty said. "If he would have gone about his business, the cop car would have gone right past him. This guy was having just the worst day."

Canadian couple celebrate 80th wedding anniversary

WINNIPEG, Canada (AFP) — Queen Elizabeth II and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien congratulated a Canadian couple who celebrated their 80th wedding anniversary this week, a local newspaper reported Wednesday. Griefie and Jacob Kulik, both 99, attribute their long life together to trust and mutual honesty, their son Gerry told the Winnipeg Free Press. The couple now has 40 grandchildren, 169 great-grandchildren and 10 great-great-grandchildren.

King to meet Clinton next week for talks on regional, bilateral issues

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein and U.S. President Bill Clinton are expected to hold talks in Washington next week on the latest developments in the Middle East and on bilateral issues. A senior official said Wednesday.

"We are still preparing for the meeting, which is scheduled to take place early next week," Ambassador to the U.S. Marwan Muasher told the Jordan Times. "The meeting would focus on the latest developments in the Middle East, and on bilateral relations."

Muasher said the exact date for the meeting has not been set yet.

On Tuesday, HRH Crown

Prince Hassan, the Regent, told Jordanians that His Majesty King Hussein "has fully recovered from his illness" and has left the Mayo Clinic to convalesce in Washington and then in London before returning home.

King Hussein was hospitalized on July 14 for treatment of cancer of the lymph glands. After undergoing six sessions of chemotherapy treatment, the King was declared free of cancer but was given a transplant from his own bone marrow as a precaution.

"As I speak, King Hussein has left hospital with the authorisation of his doctors in the Mayo Clinic following the complete success of the treatment," Prince Hassan told Jordanians on Tuesday.

Muasher, who was at hand to welcome King Hussein at Andrew's Air Force Base in Washington.

Tuesday stressed that His Majesty is in excellent health.

"His Majesty had been completely cured and looks in a great shape," Muasher said.

As for the date of His Majesty's return home, officials said the King is expected to spend around a week in Washington before leaving for London, where he will stay for about two weeks, before heading for Amman.

Prince Hassan told Jordanian and Arab television viewers that "a few days of recuperation will pass before he [the King] arrives in Jordan."

(Continued on page 12)



Schoolgirls on Wednesday pass by a mural painted by children in a main street to celebrate His Majesty King Hussein's recovery (Reuters photo)

Iraq and U.S. clash; U.S. denies plane shot down Baghdad says Iraqi farmer killed in attack

IRAQ SAID one farmer was killed and two other people were wounded in an Allied attack Wednesday after its anti-aircraft batteries opened

fire on "enemy" aircraft. Baghdad said it was "virtually certain" that it had downed one Allied aircraft in the initial clash.

"Our anti-aircraft batteries fired missiles at Allied aircraft coming from Saudi Arabia which had come close to our positions forcing them to

head home," a military communiqué said. "It is virtually certain that one of the aircraft was hit," said the communiqué carried by the official news agency INA.

"A second group of enemy aircraft violated our airspace at 10:13 a.m. (0713 GMT) and fired missiles on the same region killing a farmer and wounding two other people," the communiqué said. Jabir Khalilawi Al Ziyadi was killed, and his brother Muhammad and wife, Lateefa Ayid Thajeel, were wounded by missile fire, the Iraqi military said.

The statement did not mention whether there were any Iraqi military casualties but said that a tractor had been destroyed in the attack.

This was the first time that the military said it had used ground-to-air missiles, with which radar is used to attack the planes.

The Pentagon said earlier that U.S. warplanes attacked an Iraqi missile site in southern Iraq after six to eight surface-to-air missiles were fired on British jets.

Soon after news broke of the clash, President Bill Clinton spoke about Iraq to Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin has been critical of U.S. policy toward Baghdad but both agreed that despite their differences "it's important to continue to build the U.S.-Russian relationship," the White House said.

The U.S. Defence Department spokesman said there were no coalition casualties and the 24 aircraft, including British Tornado and U.S. F-16 fighter jets, had returned safely to base with no damage. He declined to say where the planes had been flying from, but most are based in nearby Arab states.

(Continued on page 12)

Sanctions killed 9,000 in November — Iraq

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Almost 9,000 people, mostly children below the age of five, died in Iraq during November because of international sanctions which block vital imports, the health ministry said Wednesday.

Out of 8,953 "deaths due to the embargo," 6,369 were children younger than five, the ministry said in a report carried by the official Iraqi News Agency INA.

The United Nations clamped sanctions on the country in 1990 after Saddam Hussein sent troops into Kuwait.

"The children died from lack of nourishment, diarrhoea and respiratory illness," the report said. Cancer was the main cause of many of the other deaths.

In October, Baghdad said 5,369 children under five and 2,464 other people died because of the embargo.

According to health ministry figures the mortality rate of infants under five has increased 16-fold during the eight years of sanctions.

Under the U.N.'s oil-for-food programme Iraq can sell \$5.2 billion worth of crude every six months to buy basic food and medicines.

Iraq reiterated on Wednesday, following the Dec. 16-19 air strikes, that it no longer wants humanitarian aid, just the end of sanctions.

Sanctions can only be lifted by the United Nations once arms inspection

tors have verified the country no longer possesses weapons of mass destruction.

Iraqi adults to receive first milk rations

On Wednesday, the Iraqi commerce ministry said it will begin distributing milk rations to adults as part of the U.N.-sponsored "oil-for-food" programme.

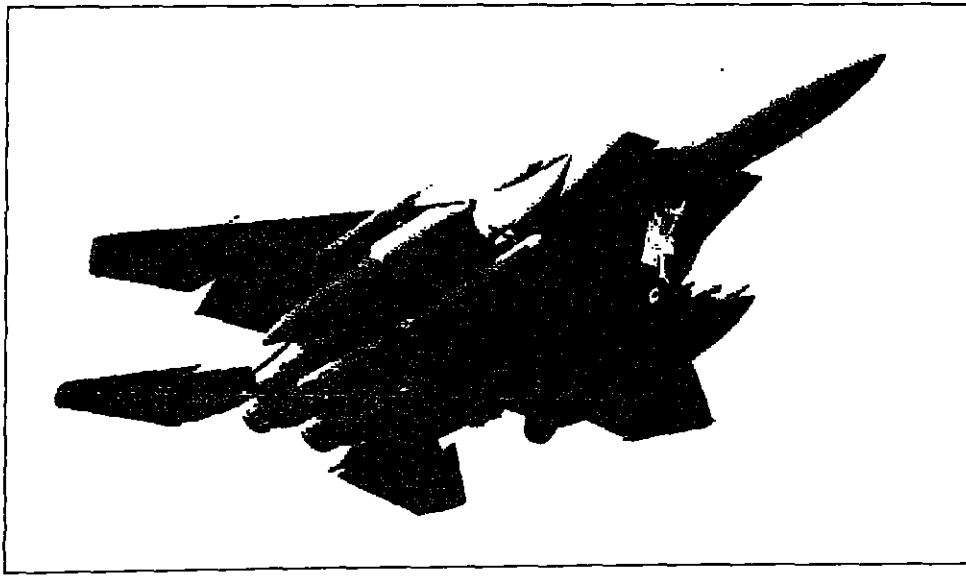
The ministry said in a statement that adults will receive 250 grammes of powdered milk and that the amount provided for infants would be increased from 2.7 kilos to 3.6 kilos. Iraqis will also receive supplies of wheat, rice, sugar, tea, vegetable oil, soap and detergent, the ministry said.

George Somerwill, spokesman for the U.N. humanitarian programme in Iraq, said that some eight million tonnes of supplies had arrived in Iraq since the fifth phase of the "oil-for-food" began on Nov. 26.

Under the programme Baghdad is allowed to export \$5.2 billion of oil every six months in order to purchase essential foods and medicines.

But the collapse of prices on world markets and the deterioration of its production facilities mean it has never reached that ceiling.

Some 100 U.N. relief workers returned to Baghdad last week after evacuating for Operation Desert Fox.



A U.S. F-15 fighter plane returns to Incirlik airbase near the southern Turkish city of Adana on Wednesday (Reuters photo)

Netanyahu urges top Likud ministers not to defect to other parties

TEL AVIV (AP) — Trying to stem a wave of defections from his political camp, embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged top cabinet ministers Wednesday not to leave his Likud Party ahead of May elections.

Netanyahu also played down a veiled threat by his closest political ally, Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, to run for prime minister.

"We are cooperating fully to win the elections," Netanyahu said on Israel radio, referring to Sharon. "I intend with his help... to lead the government forward."

Netanyahu is fighting an uphill battle to win re-election May 17.

He faces a growing field of challengers, including members of his own Likud Party who either seek to wrest the party's nomination from him

or plan to run on their own slate.

Netanyahu's former foreign minister, David Levy, is negotiating the terms of a political partnership with opposition leader Ehud Barak. His agricultural minister, Rafael Eitan, has announced that he is seeking the premiership. Eitan heads the Tsomet Party which ran on a joint slate with Likud in 1996.

Two key cabinet members from Likud, Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Communications Minister Limor Livnat, are considering leaving the party to join a centrist slate being formed by a popular former army chief of staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak.

Mordechai's departure would be a serious blow for Netanyahu and underscore his growing political isolation. Mordechai is popular among the Likud rank-and-file, especially with Sephardi voters.

It is speculated that if Mordechai quits the Likud, Sharon will make his move and challenge Netanyahu for the premiership.

(Continued on page 12)

PNA determined to declare state

RAMALLAH (AFP) — Israeli elections due in May will not interfere with the Palestinians' declared intention to announce a state the same month, a senior Palestinian official said in remarks published Wednesday.

The Labour and Likud parties have agreed to hold general elections on May 17 — two weeks after a May 4 deadline when the interim period foreseen by the Oslo accords ends and the Palestinians have said that they will announce an independent state.

"There is no change in the

plan to declare a Palestinian state on that date," Ahmad Qoreia, the speaker of the Palestinian legislature, told the Ramallah-based Al Ayyam newspaper.

"Competition between the Labour and Likud parties will not lead to a change in this date in order to please one party or another," Qoreia said. "We are not offering bribes to competing parties."

Palestinians widely believe that the choice of May 17 is a tactic to put pressure on the Palestinian leadership to pull

back from May 4 when the five-year interim period foreseen under the Oslo agreements is due to end.

By that point, final status talks to resolve such issues as the right of return of refugees, the final borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories, control of water resources and the final status of Jerusalem are also supposed to have been settled. "The priority for this [Israeli] government is not the peace process but to retain power," Qoreia told Al Ayyam.

Politicians paint gloomy picture of 1998; analysts pin hopes on Tarawneh government

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — While political activists insist that 1998 has seen a regression in the country's nascent democratic process, analysts point to many positive steps taken by the current government in response to public sentiment. Media insiders and historians, former officials and political scientists, all agree that the government of Fayez Tarawneh, which took office in August, has saved the year from being listed among some of the worst times for democracy since liberalisation was launched in 1989.

Recalling the government of former

Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali heavy-handed reaction against pro-Iraq demonstrators in Ma'an in February, and comparing it to the more liberal attitude that prevailed during the recent Anglo-American attacks against Iraq, analysts stress the more sophisticated approach taken by Tarawneh's team towards public opinion and civil society institutions.

But wiser crisis management strategies and more refined public relations skills are not enough to push forward the country's young democratisation process, say political activists and party leaders, insisting that the continuation of the country's democratic

march hinges on new and more modern elections and press laws.

"Democratisation is a process, and naturally during such a process there are steps forwards and steps backwards," says one former official.

The endorsement of the controversial 1998 Press and Publications Law, rechristened by journalists as the "Punishment and Prohibitions Law" and blasted by international human rights groups for "putting freedom of expression under siege," was "a big step backward," the former minister admitted.

"But in drafting the balance sheet of democratic life in 1998, we should

remember both the good and the bad, and keep the faith," he said.

"The fact that the [Tarawneh] government said it would not implement the law strictly and kept its word, should be considered as a victory for civil society," the source noted.

"It means that our civil society institutions are still able to fight a battle and that there is still a democratisation process which renders it impossible for the authorities to implement regulations that are not implementable at the threshold of the 21st century," he said.

(Continued on page 12)

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Despite Ramadan alcohol ban, some Jordanians will drink 1999 in

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — For many who are used to drinking and dancing the night away in public places on New Year's Eve had better think of other alternatives to celebrate since alcohol is banned during Ramadan, which for the second year in a row coincides with the turn of the year.

Under the ban, most hotels in the Kingdom will not be able to throw New Year's Eve parties, traditionally a main source of income.

For the duration of the holy month of fasting, all Jordanians, Muslims and Christians alike, are banned from buying alcohol. Foreigners, however, may drink only at home or in bars at five-star hotels if they show proof of nationality.

Last Year, the Ministry of Interior reminded all hotels and night-clubs in Jordan of the ban. This year, according to Interior Minister Nayef Qadi, no instructions were issued since "everybody is abiding by the law, and there was no need for reminding them."

Some Jordanians wishing to celebrate and drink despite the ban said they have already arranged for private parties in restaurants after obtaining a license to serve alcohol. Others said they will be celebrating at home with friends.

"I will be going to a restaurant with friends and relatives and they said alcohol will be served," said 19-year-old Lina. She told the Jordan Times that she

thought it was unfair for those who wanted to celebrate New Year to be denied from doing so.

"Religion is a private matter and fasting is something between God and the worshiper, therefore I don't think the government can oblige or force whoever wants to drink to stop. Who wants to drink will drink and who doesn't will not, they will find a way regardless of the ban," said office manager Sirina Hazou, who will spend her New Year's Eve at a friend's house.

Yousef, 45, a photographer, described a New Year's eve without alcohol as "miserable," but said religious commitment especially in such a holy month stops people from drinking. "So we will try to get by without alcohol this year," he added.

Many poor Jordanians, who make up over 30 per cent of Jordan's 4.2 million, were not concerned about the ban since they do not drink and could barely afford the basic needs for their families.

Hotels which seem to be abiding by the ban, have said they were holding non-alcoholic dinner parties.

Rula Wardah of the Jordan Intercontinental food and beverage department said the hotel was not holding any New Year's parties. But rather hosting dinners at both the Mexican and Indian restaurants for tickets ranging from JD14 to JD35 per person.

She told the Jordan Times that no alcohol will be served for Jordanians or Arab nationals during

the dinners. "Only foreigners can get alcohol," she added.

"We hope the large number of people showing up at our Ramadan evenings will make up for any financial losses to the hotel for not holding New Year's Eve celebrations," she said, referring to parties where customers can drink juices and eat special sweets, play cards and backgammon, smoke an argileh (water pipe) and listen to traditional "oud" playing.

The Meridian hotel said it was holding similar dinner parties, while Radisson SAS said there was nothing planned for the New Year in Amman, but that the hotel branch in Aqaba would be giving a party with alcohol.

Some restaurants said they were holding private parties for those who obtained licences to drink alcohol. Others said they planned New Year's Eve celebrations with alcohol served secretly in tea cups and mugs.

"There is not much profit in serving dinner without alcohol for us in New Year," said Ala' Ibdah, reception manager at Bonita hotel and restaurant.

However, Al Hosh Restaurant owner Munassir Abu Tayib, said his restaurant will be holding a party with the usual entertainment but without alcohol. "I don't think not serving alcohol will be a great loss for many restaurants since they obtained licences... and for us Ramadan evenings seem to make good profit because of the increase in customers," he added.

Local newspapers have seen a

number of ads in the past weeks placed by travel agencies inviting Jordanians to celebrate New Year's Eve in nearby cities like Beirut, Nicosia, and Egyptian resort towns on the Red Sea including Sharm Al Sheikh and Hurghada where drinking is allowed.

Hotels in Egypt and Syria seem to follow similar bans on alcohol during Ramadan and hence will not be hosting any New Year's Eve festivities.

Mohammad Ansari at Al Abilyah Travel Agency which offered a trip to Egypt's Sharm Al Sheikh including transportation, a four-day, three-night stay and the New Year party, said the trip was fully booked.

He added that the number of travellers on New Year trips declined from previous years but could not say if he thought it was due to the month of Ramadan to an economic downturn in the country. Another travel agent who preferred anonymity said despite the reasonable offers given to the public, demand was much lower than previous years.

Khaled, at Paradise Travel Agency attributed the decline in travel for the New Year festivities abroad to people's respect for Ramadan. "Ramadan comes once a year, and it is a holy month, one would think twice before ruining the good he has done in Ramadan by drinking for one night," he said, adding that people would also save that trip abroad to the Eid Al Fitr feast, marking the end of Ramadan.



Iraqi children play with a paper kite by the Tigris river in Baghdad, Wednesday, 1998 (AP Photo)

Professional associations meet to assess Iraq donation drive

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The 100,000-member influential Jordan Professional Association decided to hold another meeting of the 13-member Executive Council to assess the donation campaign launched last week to help the Iraqi people after an American and British missile attack, said Hussni Abu Gheideh, a member of the association's Executive Council.

The Executive Council held a meeting Wednesday to study how to send the donations to Iraq, but head of the Engineers Association Abu Gheideh, said they were forced to postpone sending the aid until the council had a clearer picture of the value of assistance.

"Some associations did not finalise collecting donations, so we decided to hold another meeting of the Executive Council next Sunday," said Hassan Jabre, head of the Agricultural Engineers Association.

"People have responded positively to the donation campaign," he said.

The donations include cash as well as medicines.

"We are Arabs. The Iraqis are Arabs too. And brothers must help each other whenever they can," said Jabre.

Referring to the eight-year-old United Nations imposed sanctions on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Jabre called on the Arab countries to help the Iraqi people in their suffering "instead of contributing to the daily aggression committed against them."

"Each country has to unilaterally lift the deadly sanctions imposed on Iraq. We must open our borders with our Iraqi brethren and ignore the United Nations' unjust resolutions," he said.

The influential 35,000-member Engineers Association, known for pro-Iraqi and anti-Israeli activism, decided to send a delegation of Jordanian engineers to assess Iraq's needs for rebuilding the roads and buildings damaged after four nights of air raids.

In another development, the Jordan Pharmacists Association

said it intends to send and sell medicines and medical equipment to Iraq in defiance of U.N. sanctions.

The union, whose members own 1,600 pharmacies and 12 pharmaceutical companies, will next Monday send trucks to Iraq carrying large shipments of a variety of medicines.

"The Jordanian authorities may prevent the trucks from crossing the border into Iraq. The vehicles may also be turned back by U.N. monitors enforcing sanctions on the Iraqi side of the border with Jordan," Abdul Rahim Issa, head of the Pharmacists Association told the Jordan Times.

"We will not wait for approval from the United Nations and if the trucks are not allowed, the truckers will return," he said.

Issa said the association had asked all drug stores, factories and medical equipment stores in Jordan to contribute to the shipment.

United Nations sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990

invasion of Kuwait ban it from importing or exporting most goods.

Humanitarian items such as food and medicine are allowed in, but every sale has to be approved by a U.N. Sanctions Committee.

He said the association was planning to sell the drugs in Iraq at low prices and was in contact with Iraqi officials about their plans.

Last Monday, the associations began a boycott of American and British drugs, medical equipment and other goods to protest against air strikes on Iraq. The air strikes on Iraq followed a report by U.N. weapons inspectors accusing Iraq of hindering their mission to dismantle the country's weapons of mass destruction programme.

Until the U.N. inspectors certify that Iraq is free of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles, the United Nations says it cannot lift the trade embargo.

'No to missiles but Turkey still threatening'

NICOSIA (AFP) — Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides won international acclaim Wednesday by deciding not to take delivery of new missiles, but Turkey blasted his proposal to deploy them on Crete instead as "unacceptable."

"This decision is an important success for diplomatic efforts made behind the scenes by the U.S., Britain and notably the Austrian EU presidency," said Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schuessel.

He admitted the opening of EU membership talks with Nicosia in November had been contested, but said the Cypriot decision not to take delivery of the S-300 missiles from Russia "justifies our advance confidence in Cyprus."

Clerides performed some delicate backpedalling Tuesday, announcing that the con-

troverial surface-to-air missiles ordered from Russia last year would not be deployed on the island, whose northern third is occupied by Turkey.

"I have arrived at the decision for non-deployment in Cyprus," Clerides said after a meeting of the all-party National Council. "I have agreed that we should begin negotiations with the Russian government for possible deployment in [the Greek island of] Crete."

But Turkey, which had threatened to destroy the missiles if they arrived in Cyprus and maintains some 35,000 troops in its part of the island, said Wednesday their deployment in Crete was equally "unacceptable."

"Deploying these missiles on the Greek island of Crete would be a big mistake," Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem told reporters in Ankara.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran offers Iraq help in ending crisis

TEHRAN (AFP) — Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said here Wednesday that Iran was ready to do all it could to end the crisis between Iraq and the international community. "Iran is ready to put forward every effort to put an end to the crisis," Kharazi said after a meeting with visiting Iraqi deputy speaker Ojail Jalal Ismail. Iran is "concerned" about the situation in Iraq and "out of solidarity, the Iranian government is attempting to reduce the sufferings of the Iraqi people," Kharazi told the official IRNA news agency.

Virtue give Erez conditional support

ISTANBUL (R) — Turkey's Islamist Virtue Party said on Wednesday it would support independent MP Yalim Erez in his bid to form a government on condition that local and general elections are held jointly in April as scheduled. "Yalim Erez... must clearly confirm in the protocols he signs with the parties [in a coalition] that elections will go ahead as decided on April 18, 1999, and be held jointly," deputy Virtue head Nevzat Yalcintas was quoted as saying by Anatolian news agency.

GIA slay eight rival Islamists — paper

ALGIERS (R) — The Algerian authorities found the bodies of eight people killed in what may have been a battle between rival Islamist factions, local dailies reported on Wednesday. El Watan and Denaïr l'Algérie newspapers said the bodies were discovered on Tuesday in Ain Deïla province, a key Islamist stronghold 130 km southwest of the capital Algiers. "The killing might be the result of fighting between the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) rebels," El Watan said.

Sudan rebuffs call for national talks

KHARTOUM (R) — The Sudanese government has rejected a call by opposition leaders for a national conference to draft a constitution and system of government representing all Sudanese, an official newspaper reported on Wednesday.

Al Anbaa quoted a presidential source as saying the presidency had refused to

receive the opposition's memorandum because a new law on political activity was the only permitted channel of political expression.

Opposition leaders had sent the memorandum on Tuesday to Sudan's President Omar Hassan Al Bashir, who banned political parties after seizing power in a 1989 coup.

Sudan is set to restore a multi-party system on Jan. 1 under a new constitution which took effect in June.

But opposition parties say they will not register under the new law. They contend that a real return to democracy requires the formation of a national unity government and the convening of a national constitutional conference followed by a

general election.

The memorandum was signed by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which groups the Umma party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the Union of Sudanese African Parties, the Communist Party, trade unions and other opposition figures.

JORDAN TELEVISION

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PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes

15:10 Carion — Superman
15:30 Science fiction — Space
Precinct
16:30(Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)
17:00 Drama — Sparks
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — Family Matters
20:00 A Journey Across the
Land of Islam
20:30 Drama — Dr. Quinn the
Medicine Woman
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film — "Cleopatra"
23:59 Comedy — Daily
00:30 End of T.X.

Friday Programmes

15:10 Animated Classics
15:30 Treasure Hunt
16:30(Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1)
17:00 The Simpsons
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — The Fresh
Prince of Bel-Air
20:00 Islamic Heritage and Art
20:30 Drama — "Babylon - 5"
21:15 Doc. — Full Circle
22:00 News in English
22:30 Drama — The X-Files
23:10 Drama — The Heart of Justice
23:59 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

05:08 Fajr
06:31 (Sunrise) Duha

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

11:38 Dhuh
14:23 'Asr
16:46 Maghreb
18:09 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la
Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel.
4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh
Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church
Tel. 4624757
The English-Language
Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel.
4892679
The Baptist Church Tel.
4628052
The Armenian Catholic
Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

CHURCHES

Cold weather conditions will prevail with skies cloudy to partly cloudy. Scattered showers are expected in the northern and central parts of the Kingdom and winds westerly moderate. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, winds northerly moderate to active, and seas calm.

Amman05/11
Aqaba10/19
Deserts03/12
Jordan Valley10/18

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 13, Aqaba 20
Humidity readings: Amman
63 per cent, Aqaba 45 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun04/11
Jerash05/15
Um Qays05/16
Madaba04/14
Petra05/15
Dead Sea11/22

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Abbas Al Haidim4885446
Dr. Arafat Ashhab5602507
Dr. Ayman Muhtaseb4875748
Dr. Jamal Jbarah5347351

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy5537004
Ruhi Al Dawa Pharmacy5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Mohammad Al Shari (02)7100588
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360

ZARQA:
Dr. Hafez Salhi (09)914144
Palestine Pharmacy (09)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 1924621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade4617101
Blood Bank4775121
Highway Police5342402
Traffic office4896390
Public Security Dept.4630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints489467
Amman Municipality Complaints4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television4773111
Radio Jordan4774111

Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority5815615
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information44-53300
Queen Alia Intl. Airport44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic, Abdli566613177
Husseini Medical Centre5856856
Luzmila4630195
Khalidi Maternity4643281/6
Akhil Maternity4643441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity4642362
Malhas, J. Amman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5607431
Jordan Hospital5607550
University Hospital5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdli5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen477101/3
Al-Bashir4775111/26
Army, Marka4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital5157100
Amal Hospital5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital(09)883323
Zarqa National Hospital(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital(09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital(09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)272775
Ibn Al Nafces Hospital(02)7101372, (02)7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital(02)7102831, (02)7103011

Speciality Hospital(02)7103100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)2014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where a should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44-52700. Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:15Sanaa (RJ)
08:25Bombay (RJ)
08:50Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
10:05Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:15Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:35Colombo (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:10Larnaca (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
18:05Kuwait (RJ)
18:05Athens (RJ)
19:00 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
19:05 Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)

Other Flights

13:15Riyadh (SV)
14:05Rome (AZ)

14:10Sharqah (AH)
14:45Doha (QR)
15:55Dubai (EK)
17:25Muscat, Dubai (GF)
18:40Beirut (ME)
19:05Paris (AF)
20:25Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40Cairo (MS)
23:10Istanbul (TK)
00:25Moscow (SU)
01:15Amsterdam (KL)
04:10London (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
For Thursday
09:30 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:10 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
22:50 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
06:15 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

For Friday
09:30 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:10 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
22:50 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:30Beirut (RJ)

10:35 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
11:00Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
11:25Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:05Kuwait (RJ)
12:10Paris (RJ)
12:15London (RJ)
12:15Athens (RJ)
12:55Larnaca (RJ)
20:10Cairo (RJ)
20:30Jeddah (add) (RJ)
00:10Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)
02:40Jeddah (RJ)

Other Flights
06:35Damascus, London (BA)
07:10Frankfurt (LH)
14:45Riyadh (SV)
15:00Annabab, Algiers (AH)
15:30Rome (AZ)
15:35Doha (QR)
17:00Damascus, Dubai (EK)
18:15 Abu Dhabi, Muscat (GF)
20:00Beirut (ME)
21:10Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40Cairo (MS)
01:55Moscow (SU)
02:15Amsterdam (KL)
04:45Alexandria (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
For Thursday
07:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)
22:00 Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW)

For Friday
07:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

PRINCESS AISHA A
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Focus sho
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By Hind-I Jara Mami

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PRINCESS AISHA ATTENDS CEREMONY: HRH Princess Aisha Wednesday hands gifts to a Martyrs Society child after attending an iftar banquet hosted by the Amman Greater Municipality for the society and the Hamzeh Ben Abdul Muttaleb Orphanage, as part of charity campaign launched on the occasion of His Majesty King Hussein's recovery. During the event, Princess Aisha distributed clothes and gifts offered by the municipality to 120 children of the society. Attending the ceremony, were Princess' husband Zeid Juma' and Amman Mayor Nidal Hadid (Petra photo)

Focus should be on quality, not quantity in education — official study

By Hind-Lara Mango

AMMAN — Jordan's education file has reflected steady progress in quantitative terms, but much more needs to be done to improve it qualitatively, according to a 1999 State of Children in Jordan report released by the Ministry of Planning this week.

The Kingdom has scored the highest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in terms of education progress, with adult literacy standing at 86 per cent and school enrolment of up to grade five, at 98 per cent.

The report said that from a human development perspective it was no longer sufficient to attend schools important how knowledge and skills are being communicated to students during the learning process.

Even though 91 per cent of children in Jordan attend schools between the ages of six and 16 years, tens of thousands drop out because of poverty, broken families and disenchantment with the educational system.

"This means that we are depriving thousands and thousands of children of their basic right to education and future opportunities to a better quality of life," said Zein Hayek, researcher at the Human Development Directorate at the Ministry of Planning.

The annual study, based on the United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) State of the World's Children Report launched in early December, is used by authorities to monitor education levels and to compare achievements.

The Education Ministry is trying to tackle the problem of school dropouts through programmes and curriculum development plans to lure more students into the educational system, added Hayek.

"It's time to make our curricula more attractive to children and make them feel that they are benefiting from being in class," she said in an interview this week.

However, independent educators suggest that teacher performance in most schools, especially public institutions, falls below international standards with a heavy reliance

on rote learning and non-participatory methods.

Curricula relevance still contain gender stereotyping and lack discussions of contemporary issues, they add. These quality concerns have impacted negatively on student's learning achievements and the level of their interaction in the classroom.

Jordan has made strides with adult literacy rates 93 per cent and 79 per cent for males and females respectively. However, Hayek said that for females in this category there had been a 25 per cent increase compared to the 80's.

The vast progress the country has achieved in its educational file reflects development, yet more steps need to be taken in context to quality aspects," Hayek said.

The female child should be made to feel she is a complete human aware of her rights by empowering community with skills and knowledge to secure the proper grounds for social progress," said Hayek.

"We need to maintain our achievements and re-focus on quality issues, and overcome disparities among groups and govern orates," she added.

The Planning Ministry report presents a brief look at children's status in Jordanian society and falls in line with UNICEF's theme this year of basic education.

"We have looked at the state of our children from the perspective of child labour, nutrition, and education," Hayek said.

According to UNICEF, 80 per cent of the region's children are enrolled at schools with nine million below 15 years out of the educational system.

UNICEF estimates that 20 per cent of the world's children are excluded from their right to basic education, including girls and working children.

The report warns that nearly a billion people will be functionally illiterate at the end of this century with a negative impact on democracy and social progress.

As to mainstreaming disabled children in schools, the Ministry of Planning has tackled this issue by calling for preventive measures

and prevention and intervention programmes to tackle child disability, child labour and malnutrition.

"The question of disabled children is a big problem here as we are not able to meet the necessary needs of these children," Hayek said.

Less than five per cent of disabled children in Jordan receive special education, she said.

"According to UNICEF's report, infant mortality rates in Jordan are much lower compared to the MENA region, standing at 20 per 1,000 live births.

"For the under five mortality rate MENA scored 62 while Jordan stands at 24 per 1,000 live births. Still this does not mean that all is well as national figures indicate a 28 mortality rate for under five-year-olds. The numbers should be lower than this," said Hayek.

Attaining sustainable human and child development, with clear strategies "should be at the top of the Kingdom's agenda," the study concluded.

Jordan first to attend Arab summit — Tarawneh

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh Wednesday reaffirmed Jordan's position on convening an Arab summit, stressing that the Kingdom would be among the first to participate in such a meeting.

Addressing a regular Lower House of Parliament session, Tarawneh said, "Jordan remains in the forefront among countries responding favourably to calls for holding an Arab summit."

He added that Jordan's serious intent was recently demonstrated in its response to a call by the Arab League for an Arab foreign ministers meeting to pave the way for the proposed summit.

The prime minister expressed the government's deep appreciation to the House for calling for an extraordinary session of the Arab Parliamentary Union (APU),

which convened Sunday in Amman to discuss United Nations sanctions imposed on Iraq and the American-British air strikes launched Dec. 17.

Tarawneh said the Parliament's call was "a true expression" of the Jordanian people's "feelings and conscience," adding that the Arab parliamentarians have passed resolutions and recommendations that best serve the Iraqi nation's interests.

During the session, attended by the Cabinet members, the House resumed discussion of the government's policy statement on civil service appointments to government offices.

Again, as the case was during last Wednesday's session, deputies voiced their criticism of the government's decentralisation policy, which grants local governors the authority to make

appointments.

Deputies addressing the session, were unanimous in saying that interference by "influential" persons in appointments, and the random selection of employees resulted in the "abuse of power."

The deputies charged that appointments in government departments and the selection of ambassadors, governors, secretary generals of various ministries, have "been confined to a particularly favoured group."

Combating administrative corruption does not happen with speeches, but rather through practical and effective measures designed to diagnose and uproot the cause of the problem, said the deputies.

The parliamentarians said the proposed policy of appointment has created an atmosphere where rules and legislation have

been abused, paving the ground for corruption, favouritism and inequality.

The deputies demanded that fair and just procedures be applied and that qualifications be considered as the criteria for appointments in various departments.

They also demanded that the Lower House of Parliament have a stronger role in monitoring and guiding the government's performance, noting "that under the centralised system, Jordan's public administration served as a model followed by other Arab administrations."

The deputies called on the government to reconsider the decentralised system for appointments so as to avoid such excesses and ensure that citizens are treated equally through the Civil Service Commission, which

used to control appointments.

The House approved a proposal by its speaker Abdul Hadi Majali to refer the matter to an ad hoc committee to study the government's proposals and put forth recommendations that can be debated in the House at another session.

In a statement at the session's outset, Majali voiced Parliament's joy over the news that His Majesty King Hussein has been completely cured and was returning home soon.

The decision was taken to send the King a cable congratulating him on his recovery.

Majali thanked HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, for his patronage of the recent APU's extraordinary session.

Court upholds death sentence of child molester/murderer

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Criminal Court has upheld its own June 1997 death sentence ruling against a 20-year-old shepherd who was convicted of molesting then murdering his niece in Tafleh in February 1996.

Ayesh Salem was sentenced to death by the Criminal Court in June 30 after being found guilty of molesting then strangling his 12-year-old niece, a shepherd in Beir Sabe' area on Feb. 21.

But in September 1998, the Court of Cassation returned the case to the Criminal Court asking it to "compare the sperm found on the victim's body with that of the defendant."

"It was proven to the court that Salem was the killer based on a criminal lab expert's testimony in early December confirming that the sperm of the defendant was the same type that was found on the victim," the court ruled.

According to court transcripts, while the defendant and victim were tending their sheep, Ayesh pinned the child to the ground and molested her.

"Fearing that her family would find out, Ayesh choked the child then threw her body next to a rock," the court said.

The court said that the defendant then told his brother, the victim's father, that he found her dead. But medical examinations

later revealed that the child was sexually assaulted and that asphyxiation was the cause of death.

The verdict, which was handed down by Justices Jihad Khasawneh, Yassin Abdullah and Omar Khleifat, will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation within 30 days.

Meanwhile, a second tribunal Wednesday sentenced two men to 10 years in prison with hard labour each after convicting them of killing a woman for "honour" reasons in the Ma'een Health Spa area in May 1997.

Ahmad Saleh, 28, and Hussein Fahah, 22, were initially sentenced to death by the tribunal, for the premeditated murder of Fatima

Z'al in her house on May 21. But the court immediately commuted the sentence to 10 years "because the victim's husband dropped charges against the defendants," who are related to the victim.

According to court documents, the two defendants heard that the victim's daughter, Hind, had become pregnant out of wedlock and that her mother covered up her pregnancy by helping her to abort the child. The court said the defendants had plotted to kill Fatima to "cleanse their family's honour."

On the morning of the murder, the two entered the victim's house and without questioning the woman, "they started shooting at

her, then stabbed her with a switchblade, then went and turned themselves in to police claiming to have killed Fatima to cleanse their honour."

Hind, who was in the house, managed to escape.

Coroners, who examined the victim, testified in court that she received 28 bullets to the head, back and chest and was also stabbed several times in the neck.

A seven-year-old child, who was in the house during the shooting incident, was accidentally shot in the ankle.

The verdict was handed down by Judges Ahmad Khatib, Ahmad Rashid and Ibrahim Ali.

1998 closes with controversial press law in force

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — The Higher Court of Justice helped Jordan's media ring in the 1998 New Year with a landmark decision in January to overturn the government's 1997 temporary amendments to the press and publications law.

It was a heady but short-lived victory for the press that took the government to task for "underhanded" tactics to regulate the public information industry.

Once the 13 weekly newspapers returned to the newsstands in February — after having been forced to close under the temporary amendments just ahead of 1997 Parliamentary elections — then the press its full energy to combating the introduction to Parliament of yet another government-drafted press law.

The draft law promised a near total clampdown on what information Jordanians are allowed to impart and receive.

The year closes with the 1998 Press and Publications Law in force.

In the ongoing political war for a freer press, the country's newspapers lost; the legislation is one of the most restrictive ever imposed on Jordan's press, research institutions and polling centres.

It allows, for the first time, newspapers to be closed at the behest of the country's courts.

The legislation's enactment by both houses of Parliament earlier this summer followed seven months of an official crackdown on the media that included an increased number of cases filed against newspapers

and arrests of journalists as well as the banning of foreign publications in numbers unprecedented since the years of martial law ended in 1989.

But certainly, the press won a few of the battles along the way, not the least of which was its ability to expose the press law as a tool crafted by a government to suit specific political ends and to stymie accusations of corruption that may very well have been warranted, journalists and political activists said.

This was aided by the dynamic and aggressive coverage of this summer's water scandal that erupted just as Parliament was debating the press law, they said.

Had the 1998 legislation been in force at the time, the country's newspapers surely would not have been able to be as aggressive and insistent as they were in demanding that responsible officials resign.

And the former government of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, which originally denied the existence of the water problem, could still have been in power.

The coverage of the water crisis was described by Al Dustour Editor-in-Chief Nabil Sharif as "the last dance for the press" before the curtains fell.

"We know that this is the 'last dance' and that with the new press law we will not be able to do it again," he said.

"We are very proud that [during the water crisis] we served our nation, but we were disappointed that while we were fighting for the public interest, we were

attacked by this [new] law," he said.

While badgering the government on paper, the press also took the government to task at the Lower House of Parliament in a series of closed door hearings on the merits or demerits as it were of the proposed legislation.

Although the outcome of the Lower House vote all but sounded the death knell for the Kingdom's newspapers, particularly the nascent weekly press, many described the hearings as the first full "democratic process" that involved the government, the Parliament, the public and the fourth estate.

"We have for once, seen a whole [democratic] process activated by the press," said former Information Minister Ibrahim Izzedine. "I think that whoever...voted in favour of the law in Parliament, has forgotten about all those journalists who have made their presence felt."

A change in government on August 20, along with tough orders from His Majesty King Hussein to fight soaring poverty, corruption, bureaucracy and nepotism, brought promises of a "soft implementation" of the law that seems to have dissipated much of the previous tension, according to journalists.

Although there seems to be renewed good will on both sides to find the spirit of the law, the latter still applies. And neither the government nor the press seems to have reached a clear conclusion about what the future has in stock.

The press lauded Minister of Information Nasser

Judeh's decision to replace the former head of the Press and Publications Department (PPD), whom many held responsible for some of the most restrictive articles in the new law, as an indication of positive official intentions.

Along with this was a decision to drop some 20 pending court cases against newspapers and a promise to form a body to liaise between the press and government to avoid the outright hostility witnessed over the last year and a half.

The PPD, which in the last four months has not filed any court case against a newspaper, has recently begun sending complaints over press violations to the Jordan Press Association (JPA) to review.

But instructions from the government to newspapers to "rectify" their financial status in accordance with the law have made some journalists sceptical, while the government has argued that it did everything in its power to make the process a smooth one.

The government, however, was criticised for its decision to pull the plug on Al Jazirah satellite television broadcasts from Amman after an aired debate between Jazirah presenter Faisal Qassem and researcher Mohammad Khalifeh, both Syrian, and director of the Institute of Diplomacy Kamel Abu Jaber on the Kingdom's 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

Although most Jordanians found the verbal attacks on Jordan distasteful, many thought that the more forward-thinking government of Prime Minister Fayez

Tarawneh could have issued a more balanced response, such as demanding air time to better explain Jordan's position.

Journalists and political activists meanwhile recognise how the government recently publicly applauded the press's role in democracy building.

"Al Arab Al Yawm newspaper revealed an important problem concerning the [sale of an] Iraqi Pipeline [to a Jordanian contractor] and kept nagging," says Iyad Qattan, PPD Director. "The government responded because there was some confusion as to what was going on, and found that the deal needed further investigation."

"This is an example of the need for cooperation between the government and the press. The two do not have to be adversaries," But says Musa Kilani, chief editor of weekly newspaper Al Urdan, the real "shortcut" to showing goodwill is for the government not to block any attempts by Parliament to amend the new press law.

A handful of Lower House deputies have recently suggested they are pushing for a revision of the law after newly-elected House speaker Abdul Hadi Majali stated that some lawmakers last summer might have been under pressure from the government to enact the law.

"That would be a step in the right direction," says Kilani.

"The other hope is that our parliament can reclaim for itself some of its own authority."

Majali said after he was elected on November 28

that "we will not allow any authority to trespass on our territory. The Parliament must abide by this [credo]."

The press itself must hold accountable some of its own rabid elements, which means that the relatively dormant JPA must be willing to somehow censure its members for unethical practices, editors and politicians said.

Traditionally, the JPA has been loathe to do so, but has recently said it is prepared to enforce its own code of ethics embedded in the JPA's law.

Although the new law can only be described as a black mark on Jordan's reasonable human rights record, many politicians and editors have summed up the past year as a painful experience.

"The press has proven itself as being what it should be...a body to reveal wrongs, and responsibly," said Randa Habib, Agence France Presse's Jordan bureau chief.

If the press proves it can effectively carry out its role, the government will take it seriously, journalists and politicians said.

And it seems that their is growing government recognition of the press' role.

"There is something happening, a growing maturity that one can see from all sides," said Habib.

While all sides have put their best foot forward for the new year, the fact still remains, however, that 1998 closes with the new press law in force.

What's going on

OLD PERFORMANCE

* Old performance at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

* Exhibition of Nabatean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Sagra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 5699141/2).

* "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orabi Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 15.

* The 10th Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 5526932), until Jan. 28.

Mobs attack military in fresh Aceh violence

JAKARTA (R) — A mob in Indonesia's rebellious province of Aceh attacked military posts Wednesday in a second day of violence in which eight soldiers have already been killed.

A military official said about 1,000 people set fire to a police station and attacked a military post near the industrial town of Lhokseumawe on the northern tip of Sumatra island, about 1,600 km northwest of Jakarta.

Security forces fired warning shots at the mob.

Regional military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Nurdin Sulistyoto told Reuters there were no reports of casualties in the attack, the latest against the military in the resource-rich province which has a long history of separatist movements.

Tuesday, 200 machete-wielding villagers stopped a public bus with 16 off-duty soldiers on board in the village of Lhok Nibung in east Aceh, torturing and killing eight of them.

The military has detained 25 people saying they appeared to be members of a pro-independence group.

The Aceh-based Serambi newspaper said the wives and children of two of the soldiers had been aboard the bus and were abducted by the mob. Their fate was unknown.

The military said 100 troops had been sent to the area Tuesday evening to keep order and search for the bodies of the eight soldiers. A further 200 troops were due on Wednesday from the North Sumatran capital Medan.

A local journalist told Reuters local residents discovered five unidentified bodies hanging from trees near where the attack occurred but military spokesman Sulistyoto denied the report.

"Our troops are still searching for the bodies and we have not received any reports of this," he said.

Local newspapers said rumours that so-called "ninja killers" were in the area had spread fear among the population in recent days, heightening tension.

Talk of ninja killers has sparked hysteria in parts of Indonesia in recent months after mysterious black-clad assassins killed more than 180 people in a murder spree in Java.

Locals said unidentified armed men had been in the area recently urging residents to join attacks against the military.

They said the situation has been especially tense in the north and east of the

province, with mobs last week setting fire to Muslim schools and homes of Islamic clerics in what appeared to be intra-religious clashes.

Aceh is one of Indonesia's most fiercely Islamic regions and has long battled against outside control, first against the Dutch colonial rulers and in recent years against Jakarta.

Locals and human rights officials say a nine-year army crackdown against the rebels involved widespread army atrocities including torture, rape and summary executions.

Indonesia's military apologised this year for past atrocities and said they were withdrawing all combat troops.

Indonesia also faces separatist insurgencies in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor and the remote eastern province of Irian Jaya. Talks are under way with Portugal to settle the dispute over East Timor by offering it substantial autonomy.

In November, three soldiers were killed in rebel attacks in East Timor.

Separatist protests in Indonesia have gained momentum since the downfall of former President Suharto in May after 32 years of iron rule during which any attempts to break away from Jakarta were swiftly and brutally crushed.

Violence has increased across the country as the economic crisis pushes millions into poverty.

Earlier this week a crowd of thousands rampaged in the town of Liwa in south Sumatra, torching two police stations after the death of a detainee in police custody.

In Medan, thousands stormed a red-light area last week to demand its closure, and police fired rubber bullets Monday at protesting farmers who had occupied a state-run plantation.

On the island of Sulawesi, the town of Poso was hit by days of unrest, culminating in riots on Monday involving some 8,000 people. Some residents said a dispute between local Christians and Muslims had sparked the violence.

"Indonesia is witnessing an appalling increase in violence, cruelty and anger," the Jakarta Post said in an editorial.

"Why has the situation become so explosive? The painful reality is that the majority of our people are suffering from economic hardships. Their pain is beyond words."

Zambians vote in local elections

LUSAKA (AFP) — Voting was slow early Wednesday as Zambians went to the polls in local government elections expected to indicate the level of support for President Frederick Chiluba's administration.

More than two million Zambians are registered to vote for candidates from 16 parties vying for 1,286 seats, 747 polling stations in the capital Lusaka reported just a trickle of voters turning up early in the day.

Local government elections were last held in 1992, a year after Chiluba came to power, when his Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) won an overwhelming victory.

Fresh elections should have been held in 1995, and opposition politicians accuse the MMD of deliberately delaying the polls.

Several opposition parties have said they are suspicious that the voters' register may have been rigged,

and that they are participating in the polls under protest.

Among the major opposition groups are former president Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party, the newly formed United Party for National Development headed by outgoing Anglo-American Corporation executive Anderson Mzoka, and the Zambia Democratic Congress, whose president Dean Mungomba was released last week after a year in jail on treason charges.

The MMD has already secured 119 seats unopposed.

Full results of the one-day vote are not expected until the weekend.

Electoral commission chairman Bobby Bwalya told reporters that voting would be postponed to a later date in some areas where roads are impassable because of heavy rains.



A Finnish Santa Claus (left), and his Russian counterpart 'Father Frost,' Ded Moroz, parade in a street of the Russian-Finnish border town of Porfyanovka. The friendly meeting was organised by the two nations' border guards (AFP photo)

Taiwan's Formosa apologises for Cambodia waste

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan industrial giant Formosa Plastics Corp said Wednesday it was sorry that mercury-tainted waste that it shipped to Cambodia had caused an uproar.

"We express our utmost regret to the Cambodian government and its people for causing their disturbance," Formosa chairman Wang Yung-Ching said in a letter to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen that was made available to reporters.

A team led by lawmaker Tseng Cheng-Nung will leave for Phnom Penh Thursday to try to resolve the dispute, a Formosa spokesman said.

Taipei has no diplomatic

ties with Phnom Penh but Tseng has close links with Cambodian authorities.

The spokesman said the team would collect samples and express Formosa's concerns, but did not say when it would take back the 3,000 tonnes of industrial waste.

Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration said samples brought back by environmentalists had tested slightly above safe standards for mercury contamination and urged Formosa to retrieve the shipment.

Local reports said Formosa was considering sending the waste to the United States or Germany. Formosa had the waste

shipped to Cambodia in late November and it was dumped in the port of Sihanoukville.

News of the waste sparked riots in Sihanoukville in which one person reportedly was killed as protesters sacked offices of local officials they blamed for allowing its import.

Four others died in a panicked exodus of more than 10,000 Sihanoukville residents fearing contamination. Cambodia's Health Ministry has said the reported deaths of at least two residents appeared linked to unprotected movement of the waste.

Formosa has said the

cement-like material was tainted with mercury but had been certified by the Environmental Protection Administration as safe for landfill disposal.

Mineshi Sakamoto, a mercury poisoning expert from the Japanese environmental agency's Minamata Institute and adviser to the World Health Organisation, said the waste could be a long-term health hazard and should be removed.

Separate tests by Singaporean laboratory Matcor Technology and Services showed mercury concentrations of 675 parts per million — far above safe levels.

Malaysian activist lashes out at prime minister, Anwar trial

HONG KONG (AP) — A top Malaysian activist Wednesday reiterated his call for the removal of Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad — but said Malaysia needs even broader reforms to avoid sliding deeper into a political and economic morass.

Tian Chua, who recently got out of jail after his latest arrest without charge, also called the sex-and-corruption case against Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim a "comedy" that is amusing the populace at a time when Malaysians should be focusing on broader issues.

Tian said the only way out of Malaysia's mess is a radical shakeup of what he characterised as a corruption-ridden political and legal system.

"We must have a steady and constant change of new blood that can guarantee transparency and accountability in government," said Tian, chairman of Malaysia's opposition Coalition of People's

Democracy.

Tian, 36, who was freed on bail Dec. 5, met Wednesday afternoon with journalists in Hong Kong to discuss the human rights situation in Malaysia.

Relaxed and soft-spoken, Tian said his interrogations by Malaysian authorities were harsh, but he said he was only slightly beaten, compared to some prisoners who were more severely abused. He added that political detainees were placed in overcrowded cells without access to clean water.

"We were jailed with drug addicts and common criminals," Tian said.

Tian's coalition, composed of 30 human rights and opposition political groups, has demanded reform and protested against Mahathir's 17-year rule.

Tian said Mahathir may call snap elections within six months, but Tian did not name an alternative political candidate that the opposition would back.

Tian cautioned that Mahathir's removal alone would not ensure a viable leadership. The immediate concern of the reform movement — or "reformasi" as it is called — was the abolition of laws that restrict political freedoms.

"We must look into the constitution itself so that civil and human rights may be better integrated," Tian said.

Tian said the ongoing Anwar trial was a sham that the Malaysian people found "extremely amusing."

"The government is determined to sentence Anwar regardless of what the independent courts say," Tian said.

Mahathir fired Anwar on Sept. 2 after deeming him morally unfit to lead the country. Anwar was arrested on Sept. 20 and badly beaten while in police custody.

Anwar now is on trial for abuse of power and will be tried separately on charges of engaging in illegal sex acts, including sodomy. Prosecutors are trying to prove Anwar had sex with

the wife of his former secretary, sodomised his family driver and abused his powers to cover up the affairs.

Tian called for an independent judiciary that did not condone intimidation of lawyers, a fair and honest electoral system, and an investigation into the business practices of Malaysia's politicians.

Because Asia's financial crisis shows little sign of abating, Tian called for loosening the ties between the political and financial communities to better position Malaysia for recovery.

"Economic affairs must be as transparent as possible," Tian said.

Tian also said the recently concluded summit of the 11-member Association of South East Asian Nations did little to further a reassessment of the organisation's founding policy of non-interference in each others' internal affairs.

"Human rights and civil liberties transcend national borders," Tian said.

at Vannivilankulam Tuesday.

The ministry did not say if government soldiers suffered any casualties in the last but said four more guerrillas were shot dead in three separate clashes Tuesday.

The Tiger guerrillas are leading a drawn out campaign for an independent homeland in the island's northeast. More than 55,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past 26 years.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Ailing UPI news agency ushers in new president

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The beleaguered United Press International news agency has named the former editor of The Washington Times daily Armand de Borchgrave as its new president and chief executive. The New York Times said Borchgrave, 72, will take over UPI in Jan. 4, said he took the job after an interview in London with Sheikh Walid Al Ibrahim, who purchased UPI in 1992 through his Middle East Broadcasting Centre Ltd. Borchgrave, who since he left the Washington Times in 1991 has been working at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based research centre, told the New York Times he planned to take UPI in a new direction. "I don't see why you would need another Reuters, AP or Bloomberg," he told the daily in a telephone interview from his home in Palm Beach, Florida. "I'm going to try to go in another direction," he said, adding that the direction would be "non-ideological." UPI is currently the shadow of its former self as one of the world's four biggest news agencies. Since its financial downfall began in the mid 1980s, most of its clients are now Web sites and local radio stations, who are served by correspondents working largely from their homes. According to James Adams, the agency's fifth manager since 1992, UPI lost \$120 million in five years. Borchgrave said he did not foresee any immediate financial problems for the agency. "The funds are in the bank for the next two years. And I have a five-year contract," he told the daily.

Air France plane lands after lost-wheel scare

LYON, France (AFP) — An Air France passenger plane lost one of the wheels of its main undercarriage on take-off from Lyon's Satolas airport Wednesday but landed safely on running, airport officials said. The Boeing 737-300 carrying 59 passengers and five crew had left Satolas for the western French town of Nantes, but then circled Satolas airport for more than 75 minutes to dump fuel before landing without any further incident. "We were scared but less so than the passengers," said airport manager Bernard Chaffagne after meeting all the passengers as they left the plane. "Everybody is fine." The loss of one of the left side wheels of the undercarriage had been noticed by the control tower as the plane took off. "This happens very rarely. An emergency landing is dangerous but there were five wheels left," said Chaffagne. Firemen stood by when the aircraft returned to the airport but were not needed. The passengers were transferred to another plane.

China blasts Japan satellite plan

BEIJING (R) — China Wednesday said Tokyo's controversial plan to launch a series of military satellites and join the United States in researching theatre missile defences could spark a dangerous arms race. "China sincerely hopes Japan will strictly abide by a defence policy limited to its own territory and coastal waters, and adhere to a peaceful development path," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao was quoted by Xinhua news agency as saying. Zhu added that Beijing is "deeply concerned about the political and military connotations of the moves as well as their possible impact on regional and global security." Tokyo last week said it would field four satellites by 2002 for defence surveillance as well as gathering intelligence on smuggling and illegal immigration. It also announced plans to begin research on a theatre missile defence system in 1999. Zhu said the programme ran counter to international trends toward peace and development and was not in tune with Japan's pacifist policy. "The development and spread of a strategic arms system under such circumstances could possibly spark arms races and harm both the global strategic balance and stability," Zhu said.

Romanian helicopter deal still up in the air

BUCHAREST (AFP) — A final decision on a controversial Romanian-U.S. helicopter deal has been put off until the end of 1999 to allow Bucharest to sort out its finances, an official source said Wednesday. The deal between U.S. aircraft maker Bell Helicopter and Romania's IAR-Brasov has been under negotiation since May 1997, but has not been signed owing to a clause obliging Romania to buy the first 96 aircraft for \$1.5 billion. If this condition is not respected the contract, under which the U.S. company would commit itself to acquiring 79 per cent stake in the Romanian firm, could collapse, officials said. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is negotiating a loan agreement with Bucharest to ease its economic woes, advised strongly against the Bell deal.

Legislators' canteen raided for serving protected quail

BOMBAY, India (AP) — The police anti-poaching squad raided a government canteen that was serving quail, a protected bird, to members of the Maharashtra state legislature in eastern India, police said Wednesday. The manager of the canteen in Nagpur, about 700 kilometres northeast of Bombay, was arrested Tuesday and charged under the Wildlife Protection Act. Hunting quail is punishable by a three-year jail term and a fine of rupees 24,000 (\$370). Newspapers reported that the manager, who uses only the name Ismailbhai, was preparing four quail when the kitchen was raided after a tip from a local conservationist group. The legislative council ordered an inquiry. It was the third high profile poaching case this year. Last month, a state legislator in Andhra Pradesh, in southern India, was found serving black buck — a rare breed of deer — at a private party. Several months ago, popular film star Salman Khan was arrested on a hunting expedition in a protected forest.

Russian astronaut will see in third New Year in orbit

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian astronaut Sergei Avdeyev plans to celebrate his third New Year in space sipping brandy round a mini Christmas tree with a fellow spaceman, the Interfax agency said Wednesday. Avdeyev, the engineer on board the Russian space station Mir, is the only Russian astronaut to have spent three New Year's Eves in orbit, Russian space agency officials said. Either he or his colleague Gennady Padalka will dress up as Father Christmas and both men will open presents sent up to Mir during the last delivery of supplies. A link-up with Earth on New Year's Eve will allow the two astronauts to talk with their families.

Two hurt in Swiss train accident

YVERDON, Switzerland (AFP) — Two people were slightly injured Wednesday when an empty passenger train collided with a shunting engine in western Switzerland, a spokesman for the rail company said. Earlier police reports said a passenger train and a goods train were involved in the accident near Yverdon train station. Two railway workers were hurt when the passenger train ran into the shunting engine which derailed.

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WFP warns 1999 outlook bleak

ROME (R) — The U.N.'s food aid agency Wednesday sounded the alarm for 1999 after an upsurge of emergencies, including wars and weather disasters this year.

"Forecasts for 1999 show there will likely be an increase in the number of countries suffering emergencies and the number of people needing humanitarian assistance," World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director Catherine Bertini said.

"We have to enter 1999 with the understanding that we may face an increased threat of famine, malnutrition and endemic hunger," she said in a statement.

Bertini said climate catastrophes like Hurricane Mitch — Central America's worst natural disaster for 200 years — economic collapses in Indonesia and Russia, resumption of civil wars in Kosovo and Angola and steady, long-term conflicts such as that in southern Sudan had been driving up hunger levels.

The Rome-based agency said a new trend prompting food insecurity had emerged — the economic emergency. In Indonesia, for example, it said the sudden financial crisis spawned massive short-

ages of food and medicine and "transformed middle-class citizens into a new population of hungry poor".

WFP is coordinating the largest humanitarian aid operation in history in Sudan, feeding some 1.8 million people to alleviate the effects of 15 years of civil war.

In Bangladesh, WFP is feeding 19 million people in the wake of devastating floods in the largest emergency operation since the organisation was set up 35 years ago.

Other key projects include China, where WFP has launched its first operations. North Korea, Angola, Kosovo, Albania and Central America.

Bertini said that every day more than 800 million people in the world were chronically undernourished because of poverty but that the face of hunger was changing and governments must put food relief at the top of their agenda for 1999.

"The crises this year show that we now have to take into account new instigators of famine," Bertini said. "We urge the international community to help us face this challenge in the year to come."

Two Congos agree non-aggression pact

BRAZZAVILLE (R) — The presidents of the two Congos have agreed a non-aggression pact at talks in Brazzaville designed to ease tension between the two Central African neighbours.

President Laurent Kabila told a news conference late Tuesday after the talks with President Denis Sassou Nguesso that his Democratic Republic of the Congo "has never sheltered mercenaries to destabilise the Congo Republic".

A joint statement said that the two countries had set up a joint commission to watch over security at their common border.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo shares a border of more than 1,300 km with its tiny neighbour, an oil-producing former French colony. Kabila's working visit was his first to Brazzaville since he

took power in May 1997. Sassou's government accused its larger neighbour on Dec. 24 of being a rear base for "subversive actions" against it.

Sassou, a former military ruler, returned to power in a brief 1997 civil war with the help of Angola. He has faced armed resistance from militia fighters loyal to Pascal Lissouba and Bernard Kolelas, the president and prime minister he ousted.

Pre-Christmas clashes with Kolelas loyalists in the southern suburbs of Brazzaville revived memories of the civil war, which killed at least 10,000 people. Estimates of the latest death toll run into hundreds.

Sassou and his Angolan allies have sent troops against the various opposition militias in the south west. Clashes have been reported there.

Estrada says it's too late to stop execution of rapist

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — President Joseph Estrada said Wednesday he would not grant a last-minute reprieve to a convicted rapist who is set to be executed by lethal injection next week.

"It's too late, it's too late," Estrada said when asked if there was still a possibility of stopping Monday's execution of Leo Echegaray, who has been convicted of repeatedly raping a 10-year-old stepdaughter.

"As I said, he committed this crime not because of poverty but because of his animal instinct, so that's unforgivable, especially to a little girl I cannot forgive that," Estrada told reporters.

Echegaray's execution, the first to be scheduled since capital punishment was restored in the Philippines in 1994, has triggered a debate among many Filipinos over the death penalty.

Last Monday, Echegaray's lawyer petitioned the supreme court to defer the execution while lawmakers review the law that restored capital punishment.

Supreme court chief justice Hilario Davide Jr. said there is a possibility the tribunal might take up the petition and issue a decision before the execution. Under its rules, even one of the supreme court's 13 justices can order to defer the execution.

In recent weeks, several senators and congressmen have expressed doubts about whether capital punishment will deter crimes and filed resolutions seeking a review of

the law that reimposed the death penalty.

The Vatican, the European Union and Canada also recently sent appeals to the Philippine government to abolish capital punishment, arguing that death penalty would not reduce widespread crime. Estrada has turned down the appeals.

Authorities in the national penitentiary in suburban Muntinlupa, where Echegaray is detained with more than 800 other death row convicts, have been carrying out mock executions in recent days.

They also have strengthened security around the prison and prepared barbed wire roadblocks to control expected protests by anti-death penalty groups.

Prison chaplain Roberto Olague said an all-night prayer vigil will be held outside the penitentiary on the eve of the execution by groups opposing capital punishment. Between 1924 and 1976, the Philippines executed 84 people.

In 1987, a new constitution abolished the death penalty but gave Congress the option of restoring it for "heinous" crimes such as murder, kidnapping for ransom, rape and drug trafficking.

Legislators, alarmed by a rise in crime, took that option, bringing back the death penalty in 1994. Many Filipinos say the death penalty will deter criminals, and that crime has become rampant because no one has been executed in recent years.



A Bulgarian woman feeds swans on a beach near the Black Sea port of Varna. Every winter a group of more than 200 swans come to Varna due to the warm coastal waters (Reuters photo)

Taiwan vows to fight China's big-power diplomacy

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan vowed Wednesday to fight China's "big power diplomacy" and warned that Beijing's intensifying diplomatic squeeze of the island could undermine its people's appetite for eventual reunification.

Foreign Minister Jason Hu assailed Beijing for aggressively courting Taipei's handful of diplomatic allies in what for Taiwan has been a losing political tug-of-war.

"I hope the Chinese Communists can understand that their pressure will spur negative feelings in the people of Taiwan," Hu said at a year-end news conference.

Hu said Beijing's reported drive to strip Taiwan of its last 27 allies by 2000 risked destroying any local desire to end the island's long estrangement from the Chinese mainland.

"Zero alliances could mean zero on unification," he said. Though public opinion is

torn between desire for eventual union with China and total independence, most polls show a deep suspicion of Beijing and strong support for the status quo — de facto independence and a wary engagement of China.

Beijing regards Taiwan as a rebel-held province ineligible for sovereignty ties, striving to bring the fledgling democracy under mainland rule and isolate it from the family of nations.

The Nationalist-led Republic of China, which has clung to sovereignty on Taiwan since losing the mainland to Communist forces in 1949, has steadily lost ground to Beijing's People's Republic of China, which squeezes Taiwan by denying diplomatic ties to any country that recognises the island.

In 1998 alone, Beijing wooed away four of Taipei's allies — South Africa, the

Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau and the tiny Pacific kingdom of Tonga.

Taipei scored a modest counterpunch by wooing the Marshall Islands — a tiny Pacific state — away from Beijing.

Taipei's 14 allies in Central America would Beijing's next target, Hu predicted.

"The Chinese Communists will intensify their unreasonable squeeze in the next year; our diplomatic environment will become tougher and tougher," Hu said.

"The foreign ministry will have more aggressive, flexible and pragmatic countermeasures to cope with the Chinese Communists' big-power diplomacy." The foreign minister said Taipei would continue to use its strong economic power to expand its international contacts and actively seek participation in international organisations.

Relative unscathed by Asia's financial turmoil, Taipei has sought to battle isolation and win friends by lending a helping hand to financially battered South East Asian neighbours.

Taiwan's economy is on track to grow about five per cent in 1998 — one of the worst slowdowns for the high-growth island in decades but still enviable compared to the recession gripping much of Asia.

Beijing has urged South East Asian states not to allow the wealthy island to exploit their woes for its political gain.

Though all South East Asian governments recognise only Beijing — Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore have privately welcomed senior Taiwan leaders in hope of tapping their economic largesse.

OSCE says Kosovo truce holding

PRISTINA, Serbia (R) — International monitors said a ceasefire was holding in Kosovo for the third consecutive day Wednesday after heavy fighting last week in the northern parts of the Serbian province.

"For the third day running we have no reports of incidents in the Podujevo area. This is a very positive development," said Jorgen Grunnet, the spokesman for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) verification mission.

Tuesday, five people were found dead in areas not directly hit by the last week's violence and OSCE observers said tensions remained high in the northern area where fighting had raged.

"There were reports of bodies being found but they were isolated incidents," Grunnet said Wednesday. "You can hardly say that there is a trend in the area."

The latest fighting, which began in Podujevo area last Thursday and went on for four days, ended when local commanders from both sides agreed to pleas from the OSCE monitors to stop shooting.

Thousands of newly displaced people, mainly ethnic Albanians, were still too scared to return to their homes this week and several villages in the area were deserted.

At least 18 people

were killed and several wounded in the violence, the worst since the October truce which followed an eight-month Serbian offensive against separatists that drove 250,000 people from their homes.

Ethnic Albanian refugees who were in the open in October, prompted NATO to threaten air strikes against Yugoslavia, forcing President Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw many of his combat forces from Kosovo.

"We estimate that up to 5,500 people from villages near Podujevo left their homes last week," an official with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said in Belgrade Tuesday.

He did not identify the newly displaced. But the population in that area, as well as in the whole of Kosovo, is overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian.

The bodies found on Tuesday were discovered in northwestern, western and southern Kosovo. The Serb-run Media Centre in Kosovo's capital Pristina said they were all ethnic Albanians and had been killed by their fellow Albanians.

There was no comment on the allegations from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas, who are fighting to split the province from Serbia and consider any compatriots who are loyal to Belgrade as traitors.

Singapore's Chee plans more talks

SINGAPORE (R) — A Singapore opposition party leader who defied a police warning not to make a public speech without a permit said Wednesday he planned to make another one next week.

Chee Soon Juan told Reuters he would not be deterred by the threat of prosecution — which could result in a Singapore dollars 5,000 (\$3,000) fine — over a speech he made in the heart of Singapore's business district Tuesday despite a police warning.

He said his speech next week would focus on human rights and what he called the Singapore government's lack of accountability and transparency on investments.

"The important thing is right now, this total lack of transparency, accountability and this overwhelming political control ... is making it extremely difficult for us to campaign," Chee Soon Juan told Reuters.

"In the weeks to come it is important for us to take the message directly to the people," said the head of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), one of two main opposition parties. Chee had a run in with Singapore police Tuesday for speaking to a lunchtime crowd at Raffles Place in the heart of Singapore's business district.

Police said in a statement that Chee had been first served a letter and when he declined to accept it, was "verbally advised" that it was illegal for him to give his speech because he did not have a public entertainment license.

It said Chee proceeded with his speech and police were investigating the incident. "If an offence is disclosed, police would consult the attorney general's chambers and charge the offender in court," the statement said.

Under Singapore's Public Entertainment Act, anyone making a public speech without a license is liable to a fine of up to Singapore \$5,000 (\$3,000).

"There is nothing I can do at this moment. They will refer it

to the attorney general and he will decide whether to proceed to prosecute me for the offence," Chee told Reuters.

Chee said he felt it necessary to tell Singaporeans about the party's platform and its beliefs even though the next general elections are not due until 2003.

The People's Action Party (PAP) won 81 of the 83 elected seats in parliament at the last elections in January, 1997.

Chee failed to win a seat. "I suppose we have to start campaigning. The PAP, right after an election they start campaigning already, four years, five years, we can't afford to wait till the last minute to get people's attention," he said.

Chee said his speech next week would focus on human rights and how it impinged on economic development and the welfare of the people and what he called a lack of transparency and accountability in Singapore government investments.

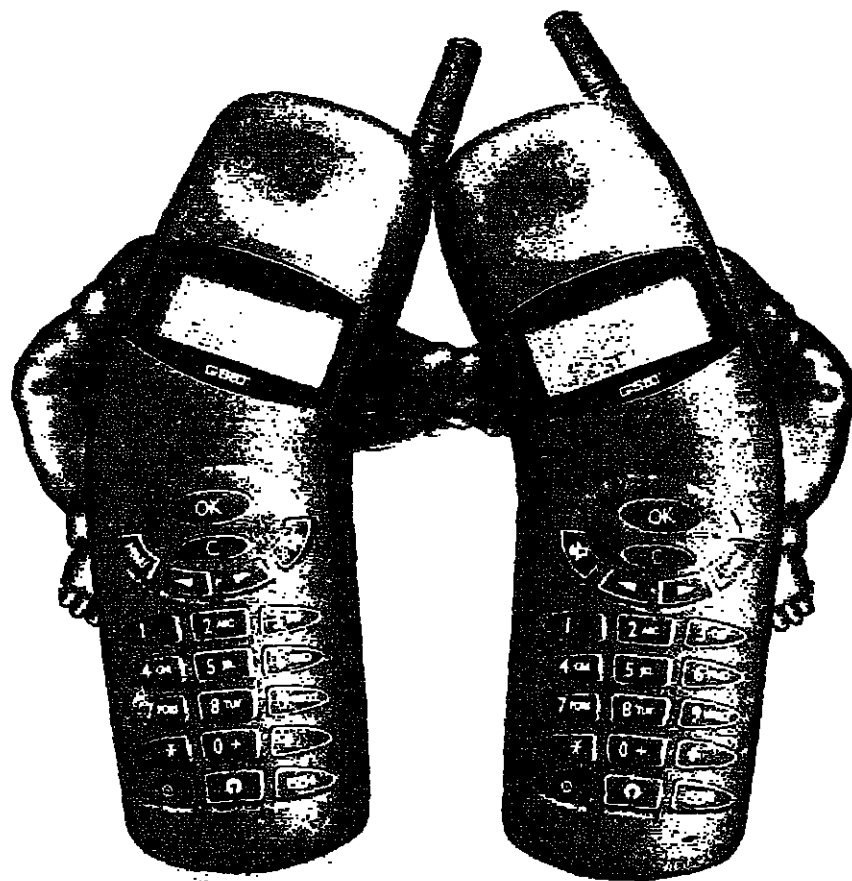
Chee's public appearance Tuesday coincided with a comment by Information Minister George Yeo that political debate could be opened up if that was what Singaporeans wanted.

Yeo said in an interview with state television broadcast late Tuesday that political debate could be opened up "as much as Singaporeans want." "In the end, every three, four, five years we go back to the vote and policies are again thrown out for public discussion," Yeo said.

He said, however, that political freedom was not on top of Singaporeans' list of priorities. "I don't think that is the majority view in Singapore," he said. "Take this economic crisis, today, many Singaporeans want strong government, decisive government."

"And if you have a general election now, a great many Singaporeans will vote solidly for the PAP government, because the test of a government is not in a boom time. The test of a government is in crisis," he said.

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Agreeing on strategy first

THE POSTPONEMENT of the emergency meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Cairo preparing for an Arab summit from this week until Jan. 24 should not be viewed as a bad omen for the convening of an Arab summit. The time between now and then should be spent on consultations among Arab states to ensure the success of such a meeting.

Surely the summit will not only discuss the issue of Iraq. Each of the participants would like to see their problems figure on the agenda of the much-sought-after summit. Not only Iraq, but Sudan, Libya, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon and not least, the Palestinians would like the summit to also tackle at the problems they face.

But even if the summit were to discuss only Iraq, the issue is so complicated, and has turned even more so in recent days, that an effort needs to be exerted to even ensure it is convened. To start with, there is the question of who should attend. Is Iraq to be invited? Surely, after all what is the point of discussing the future of Iraq without that country being represented? But if Iraq were to attend would Kuwait come to the meeting? Would all Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia attend? And what would the U.S. position on the summit be? These are not only very complex questions, their resolution requires a great deal of wheeling and dealing.

We, therefore, don't see the holding of an expanded Arab summit possible at the moment.

What is possible is the holding of a mini-summit bringing together the leaders of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinians, and Syria. Such a summit should discuss not only Iraq but all other problems plaguing the region including Arab divisions, the peace process, sanctions against other Arab countries, and oil. Those five leaders, being the most affected by the situation in Iraq and the peace process should then devise Arab strategies for dealing with all the problems facing the Arab World and then promote those strategies in other Arab capitals, in the West and the U.N. It is only when the Arabs decide on common strategies to solve their problems, will the rest of the world, but especially Washington, take them seriously.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AI Ra'i's Fakhri Kwar said that the Jordan Petroleum Refinery company's claim that there is no shortage in daily gas cylinder supplies needs to be re-examined. It is a fact that there is a shortage crisis, and citizens are well aware that their needs cannot be easily met, said Kwar. Figures indicate that the refinery's gas cylinders distribution has dropped to less than half of consumption intake in each of Amman, Zarqa and Irbid, the writer said. For instance, Amman's daily consumption of gas cylinders is estimated at 65,000 cylinders, but the company now distributes 25,000. Similarly, Zarqa and Irbid use 25,000 each, but are now only receiving 5,000, according to the writer. Kwar said although the problem - resulting from the recent U.S.-U.K. aggression against Iraq which is Jordan's main supplier of fuel oil and domestic gas - is no longer a secret, the company denies that there is any crisis for unknown reasons, ignoring the above mentioned figures. It is not the firm's fault or negligence, but instead of handling the issue in a "transparent" manner, the refinery was "impractical" in its dealing with people, Kwar said.

AI Dustour's Mazen Saket said the Arab foreign ministers' meeting and the planned subsequent Arab summit, were postponed, due to the Arab regimes' differing stands regarding the recent U.S.-U.K. aggression against Iraq. The postponement proves that the U.S. has been practising pressure on Arab countries to delay such meetings, said Saket. The writer noted that two points prove that the Arabs are weak and "involved" in the U.S.-British plan to destroy Iraq. Firstly, the postponement of the Arab foreign ministers' meeting contradicts the outcome of the Arab parliamentary union's emergency meeting held on Sunday, which condemned the allied air strikes on Iraq, said the writer. This means, Saket said, that the Arab parliaments and their systems are "useless." Secondly, at a time when everything points to an intent by the U.S. and the UK to resume their attack on Iraq immediately after the Holy Month of Ramadan, the Arab foreign ministers' meeting was postponed, leaving the door open for more aggression, according to the writer.

Young talents: Seek 'em and keep 'em

View from Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

THE OTHER day, I was re-reading a book I bought a few years ago (Theodore Peterson, et al, "The Mass Media and Modern Society," New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), when I came across a section espousing a premise which neither our public nor our private institutions have as yet even started contemplating seriously - at least the majority of them does not.

In a chapter entitled "education for communications," the authors say: "finding new staff members is a perennial topic of discussion at conventions and meetings of industry organisations, business publications, and broadcasting." The authors then add, which is the point I am interested in highlighting here: "some employers aggressively seek out talented young persons. One Midwest daily sends its personnel representatives as far as five hundred miles away to look for promising staff members. At least two Eastern magazine publishers have representatives tour Midwest colleges each year in search of editorial and business talent." This was said

more than three decades ago. With respect to the first part of the section (that which concerns the need for new, talented staff members), it is something we share with the rest of the world. One main concern (desire or declared intention at least) of our various establishments and institutions is recruitment of able personnel. Employers in our part of the world complain the whole time that young men and women seeking jobs in our society are not up to their standards. They have neither the know-how, nor the talent.

An unfair generalisation no doubt, but one which is quite widespread. With respect to the second part of the section (that which concerns the active search for talent on part of the institutions themselves), it is something that simply does not happen in our part of the world. For our institutions to "aggressively seek out talented persons" is almost next to impossible. Not only do they not "aggressively" seek out, but in fact they do not seek out at all.

What occurs in reality (forget the lip-service discourse) is the

opposite. Most often, our institutions (or a majority of them) sit arm-tied, passive, complacent and conceited and expect young men and women themselves to seek them out, to come begging for employment.

Not only is the concept of seeking out or seeking out aggressively itself absent from our institutions' collective consciousness, but the very concept of hiring young talents may itself be absent.

If you read job advertisements or listen to employers, what they are after, in most cases, is experience. Most ads and most employers want people with five or ten years experience, at times in a field of specialisation or line of work so narrow that you wonder who would actually qualify for such a job. It is only in very few ads - once every blue moon - that you hear about a company requesting young people of potential or ability. Most of our institutions have an experience complex and a seniority complexity.

The absurdity, snobishness or ignorance (or a mixture of these three things together) of our

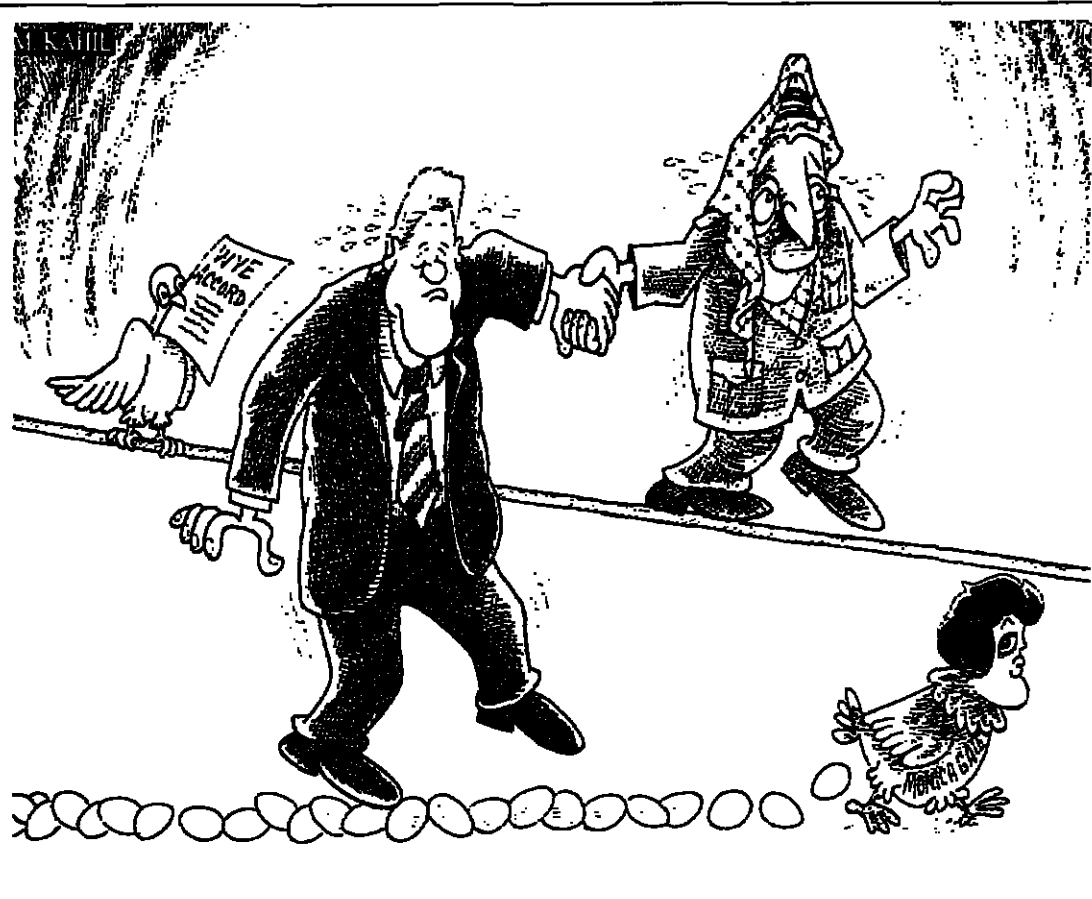
chance to develop, through rigorous training or challenging tasks, nor are recognised as talented, they end up either doing their job half-heartedly or quitting. The majority of our institutions are blind in this respect.

They neither spot talent nor are able to nourish, foster and keep it.

It would be interesting to conduct a study as to how many jobs our university graduates quit in, say, the first five years of their careers. It would be equally interesting to conduct a study as to how many of our young people leave their institutions for others in some of our neighbouring countries. For what reason? No, not money, comfort or prestige - although these are factors to be considered. They quit or leave for moral or psychological reasons.

The tragedy of our talented young people is triple: they are not sought after, not recognised and not given enough incentives either to excel or to stay in their jobs when they are hired.

institutions is quite amazing. It is more, far more, than amazing in fact: it is tragic. Very often, our institutions end up hiring some talented individuals - not because the institutions themselves are good at spotting talented persons, but because the talented persons themselves apply. What happens after they are hired? Most often, because they are neither given the



Developing world at Khouri

Israel's coming of age

TO OBSERVERS of the economics of the region, the past year might go down in history as the one in which Israel finally began to come of age. The spoiled kid of both the Cold War and the New World Order, Israel, at the ripe old age of fifty, may be starting to be treated as an adult by its friends in the West.

One sure sign of the passage of childhood is the disappearance of Santa Clause: sure enough, on December 24 the presents failed to arrive, as the European Union (EU) indicated it might deny Israel funds to protest the suspension of peace moves with the Palestinians. It seems that a European Council of Ministers working group has decided to exclude Israel from an EU programme that offers research and development (R&D) financing. In any case, a final decision on Israel's participation in this scheme will be taken in the second week of January, at which time Santa might make a belated arrival after all.

The EU Council of Ministers may have been linking the money to Israel's freeze of the Wye land-for-security deal. Israel and the EU have been at odds for some time over policy towards the Palestinians, including such issues as how to classify Palestinian exportables, along with goods from Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

The EU's holding back of this finance may have something to do with politics, but it is also a sign that Israel's economy is finally being recognised for what it really is: a maturing developed one that is far from being a candidate for foreign aid. Israel spends a colossal three per cent or so of its GNP on R&D, and a lot of that is its own money. Most of the world's richer, more developed countries would have trouble rivaling such a performance.

Denying Israel foreign funding is not fun for the Jewish state, but it is not the end of the world either. The stark fact is that Israel

is no pauper, and actually has the region's most advanced economy.

This developed status was highlighted in 1998 by none other than Stuart Eizenstat, U.S. assistant under-secretary of state for economic, business and agricultural affairs. Eizenstat said that "Israel is really now at the cusp of developed country status in terms of per capita income, in terms of performance of its economy, in terms of its profile, and exports per capita." For that reason, he added that Israel should no longer view itself as a developing country, and move more aggressively towards adopting economic policies and goals that are more in line with those established by bodies such as the 29-member Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For readers unfamiliar with this body, the OECD is a grouping of the world's most developed states, including the U.S., Japan, Germany, etc.

Eizenstat said Israel needs to begin "living by the rules of the global economy" and "adopt market disciplines," that can place it firmly on a path to continued economic growth. In the same breath, Eizenstat reviewed the policy recommendations that emanated from the U.S.-Israel Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG).

Established more than a decade ago by the State Department during one of Israel's nastier economic crises, the JEDG is a consultative body set up to discuss Israeli economic policy with the U.S. The American delegation to JEDG meetings is comprised of top U.S. economists, led by none other than Assistant under-secretary Eizenstat. Ever the diplomat, he stressed that the U.S. recommendations for Israeli government economic policy are not an attempt to micro-manage Israel. "These are our recommendations. They are not necessarily endorsed by the Israeli government. They are not joint recommendations. They are not dictates or demands," Eizenstat

insisted.

Nevertheless, the pronouncements of the JEDG do carry some weight, and the recommendations to which he referred were an attempt by the U.S. to provide suggestions to help Israel cut its budget deficit, break the back of "double-digit inflation psychology," and focus on spending reductions instead of tax increases.

On inflation, the JEDG recommended that in 1999 Israel establish a low single-digit inflation target, and reduce it by one per cent annually thereafter. Doing so would put Israel in line with the general level of inflation in the OECD economies and help the Jewish state break out of the cycle of inflation psychology once and for all. Eizenstat added there is more Israel can do to ensure continued economic growth, such as reducing what he described as a "bloated" public sector, increasing market competition, and being more aggressive about privatisation.

A few days after making these important public statements, and in response to a question I put to him about Israel no longer having the status of a developing country, Eizenstat rightly observed that "Israel has a seventy billion dollar gross domestic product," concluding that "it is phasing out, at its request, the economic support fund assistance that the U.S. has been providing for several decades."

For Israel to thrive economically it has to both adopt the attitudes set out by Eizenstat and the JEDG, and to live with its neighbours within the context of a just, lasting, and comprehensive regional peace. In other words, the Israelis have to turn both their steel swords and their cast iron begging-bowls into plowshares. Though 1998 showed that Israel still seems to be as warlike as ever, might it at least finally be ready to shed its assisted-economy status and embark on real internal reforms?

One year, one per cent

Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kuttab

For Palestinians, 1998 was supposed to be the year of land reclamation. Instead it has turned out to be a year of unfulfilled U.S. and Israeli promises and commitments.

DESPITE THE disappointments of 1997 under the Netanyahu government, Palestinians entered this year with high expectations. Armed with the letter of former U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the Palestinian National Authority expected real changes on the ground.

The U.S. written promise pledged that the State of Israel would withdraw from all occupied Palestinian lands except settlements, Jerusalem and military installations. But with a new, pro-Israeli U.S. secretary of state, these hopes of major land reclamation were dashed.

Madeline Albright introduced a new formula to the peace process. Using the Israeli prime minister's terminology, Albright and her peace team, headed by Dennis Ross, promised a package deal that is built on the concept of reciprocity. And instead of the previous Oslo criteria of lands to be returned in the interim phase, Albright came up with yet another compromise on behalf of Palestinian lands. She suggested an arbitrary figure of 13% of lands currently under direct Israeli security control to be turned over to the Palestinians in the second phase of redeployment.

To ease Palestinian dissatisfaction she made another promise. The side that will reject the U.S. compromise, and thus delay the peace process, will be publicly exposed. With such a promise and a high profile commitment by the U.S., the Palestinians reluctantly agreed to the idea of a 13% withdrawal.

Again they were promised that this was a package deal which would not be open for negotiations.

But negotiating this deal was what the Israelis insisted on and finally the U.S. agreed to, without ever having publicly chastised the Israelis as they had promised. Instead of a 13% withdrawal, they wanted a 10% withdrawal with a further 3% of land to be turned into a nature reserve. The nature reserve idea had nothing to do with the Israelis love of nature or the environment. It was a way to prevent future Palestinian building on their own land.

Again this compromise on the part of the Palestinians was to be tested and further diluted. Upon Israeli insistence, the Netanyahu government made a number of further security conditions. They also wanted to dictate what will be shown on Palestinian television, written in the Palestinian press and taught in Palestinian schools.

Ever cognisant of the fact that they are the weak side of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, the PNA again accepted the compromises. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, resembling the life of the biblical figure Job, showed amazing patience. His eyes focused on the promise of the return of Palestinian lands, he accepted the humiliating conditions. He even invited the U.S. secret security to the Palestinian area to arbitrate the repeated and unsubstantiated Israeli claims that the PNA was soft on extremist Islamic movements.

With personal help from U.S. President Bill Clinton, this latest compromise on behalf of legitimate Palestinian rights was finally etched in what Palestinians thought was a binding document.

The signing of the Wye Memorandum was supposed to set in motion a reciprocal set of actions that is expected to climax with the Israeli military withdrawal from 13% of illegally-occupied Palestinian territory. Palestinians arrested Hamas leaders, issued a decree against incitement, set a date for collecting all illegal weapons.

In return, and after a few hiccups, Israel reluctantly withdrew from 1% of Palestinian lands and allowed the Gaza International Airport to be opened. However, the long awaited safe passage corridor between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was not opened. The second stage was now set and the Palestinians, as agreed upon in the Wye Agreement, met to reaffirm the cancellation of all clauses in the PLO charter that violate the peace accords.

U.S. president Clinton came to Gaza in person to witness this event and tried his best to extract the Israeli part of the agreement but to no avail. He could not even produce the opening of the safe passage corridor, with Israel demanding that it had the right to arrest any wanted Palestinian travelling on this safe passage way!

The year is almost over. It has been full of Israeli attempts to circumvent signed agreements. The Netanyahu government has refused to honour the Oslo Agreement, which was signed by a representative of the state of Israel. And he has refused to honour the Hebron and Wye agreements which he himself has signed. Further, he has cheated Palestinians on the prisoner release issue, pardoning common criminals, instead of the security prisoners.

And now a new problem has emerged. The drafter of the Wye agreement apparently forgot to place a clause about what happens if Israel decides to hold early elections. Never mind that these elections are scheduled six months from the day that Netanyahu lost his coalition majority.

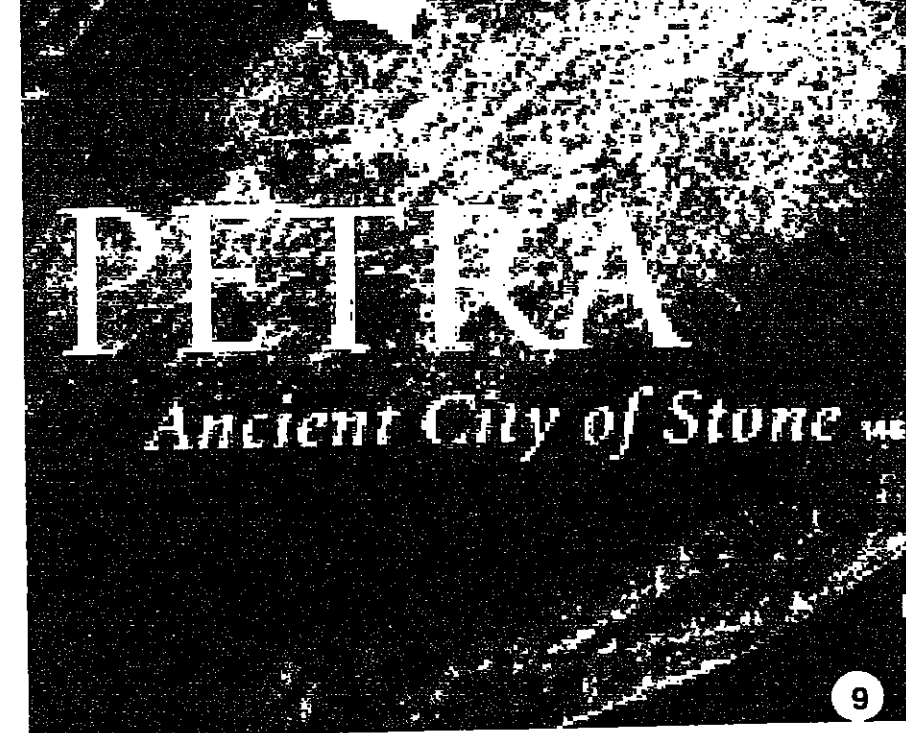
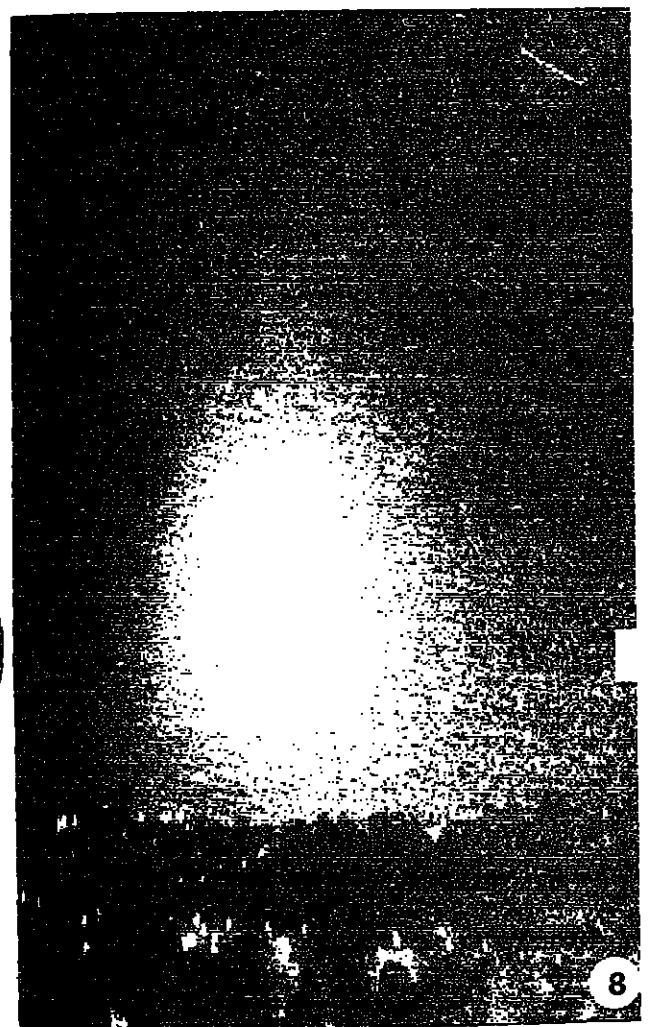
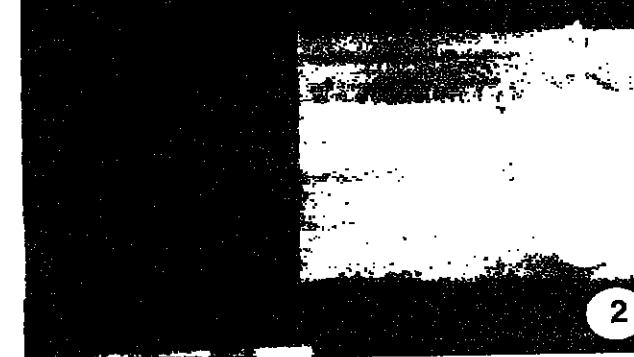
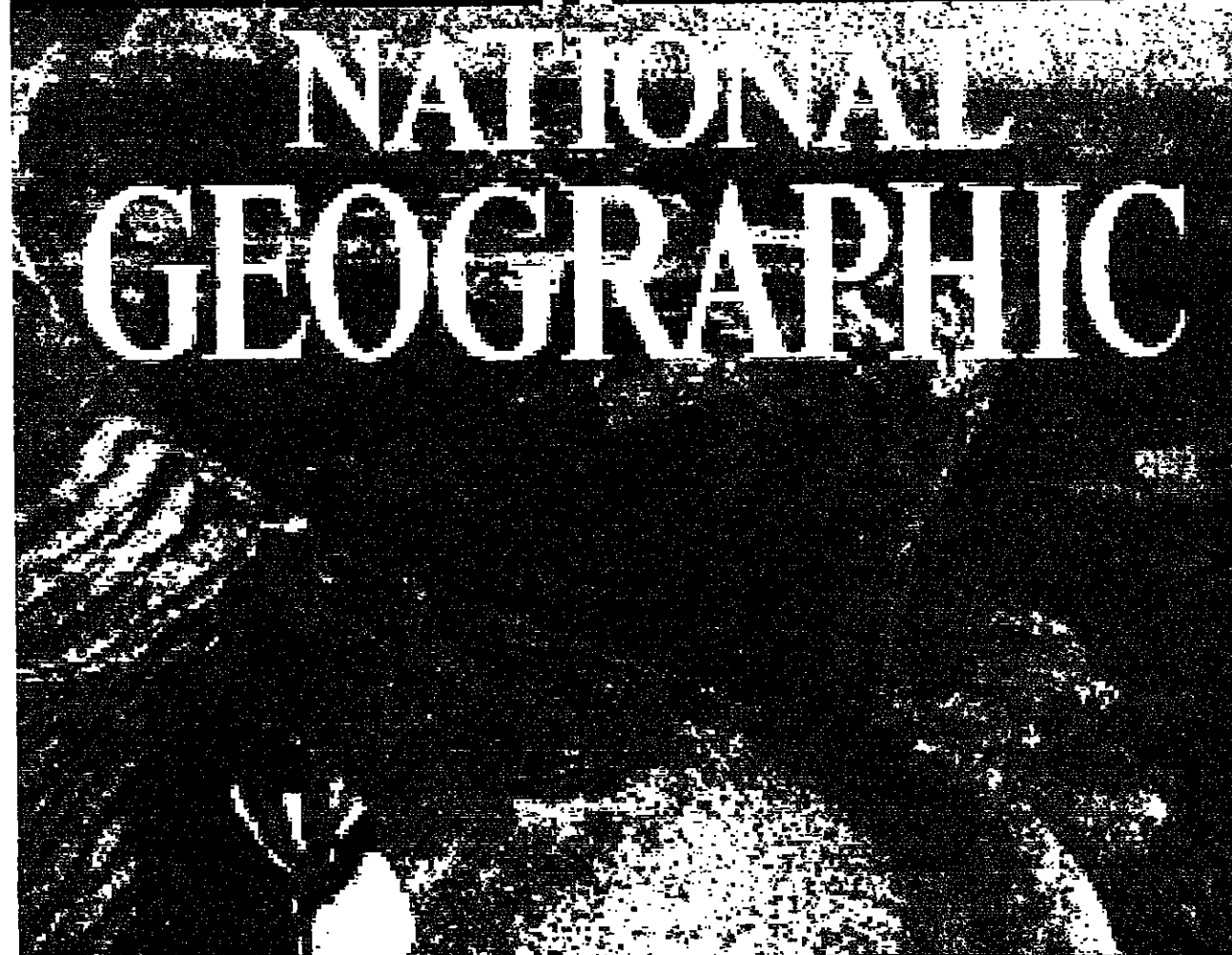
1998 began with Palestinians expecting Israel to withdraw from nearly 50% of the West Bank and Gaza. Instead they ended the year with a promise to in fact withdraw from 10%, and in reality they have withdrawn from 1%. At this rate the Palestinians will not be able to liberate their own lands that were illegally occupied in 1967 till the year 3,000.

His Majesty King
President Bill
President Yasser
Minister Benyan
Secretary
Bright, followi
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His Royal High
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West Bank. 8-
strikes against I
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Games on Dec. 6



Happy New Year!

1- His Majesty King Hussein with U.S. President Bill Clinton, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, following the signing of the Oct. 23 Palestinian-Israeli Wye River peace accord, at the White House. 2- His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, opening the second ordinary session of the 13th Parliament on Nov. 28. 3- Zeineddin Zeidane holding the World Cup following France's victory in July. 4- A caricature mimicking Clinton's Lewinsky affair. 5- Al-Rai's Hajaj's impression of former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet. 6- Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh's government, sworn in on Aug. 20. 7-Violent unrest between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the West Bank. 8- The U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq, launched Dec. 17. 9-National Geographic's cover story on Petra for its December edition. 10- Jordan's team at the opening of the Asian Games on Dec. 6.



Euroland prepares for New Year's birth of single currency

PARIS (AFP) — Europe's bid to become a world financial superpower was all set Wednesday as authorities finalised their preparations to fuse the currencies of 11 EU countries into the euro.

A ceremony Thursday in Brussels to be attended by European Union (EU) financial ministers will officially set the conversion rates for the single currency between 1130 GMT and 1230 GMT, ushering in monetary union that many predict will result in Europe one day rivaling the United States as the world's pre-eminent economic mover and shaker.

The changeover to the euro takes effect from the first few seconds of Jan. 1.

For ordinary Europeans, there will be no perceptible difference until their familiar national notes and coins are replaced by euros and cents in 2002.

But for companies, banks and governments, the event is revolutionary — and irrevocable.

"In the future the euro

will represent 30 per cent of (world) trade, on the basis of estimates which do not appear to be exaggerated," EU Monetary Affairs Commissioner Yves-Thibault de Silguy said in an interview published by the Spanish newspaper El Mundo Wednesday.

As a comparison, the dollar, he said, was currently used for 80 per cent of financial transactions in the world and for 50 per cent of trade transactions.

The euro offered the possibility of trying to rebuild the Bretton-Woods system of managed exchange rates which collapsed in 1971 when the United States ended conversion of the dollar into gold, he said.

Already, the lead-up to the euro's debut has proven to be a godsend for the euro zone countries, protecting them from the worst of the global financial instability blowing in from Asia, Russia and now Latin America.

Statistics suggest that in

1999 and 2000, economic growth will drop sharply for all countries, particularly in Britain — which is not in the euro zone — and in the United States.

However, for the 11 countries under the euro umbrella — Austria, Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain — the slowdown is expected to be relatively less painful.

That stability, inherited from Germany's much-respected Bundesbank which formed the model of the European Central Bank (ECB), also makes Europe an attractive destination for international investors.

Historically, the move to create the single currency was a major gamble, but one that paid off when financial markets showed a year ago they believed that the ECB would be a credible manager of euro zone monetary policy.

Relying on this support, and speaking from the strong position of seeing

the birth of the euro heading to a flawless launch, ECB President Wim Duisenberg on Wednesday called for Britain to put aside "psycho-political" objections and participate in the euro zone in its own interests and in those of the euro and of Europe.

Speaking to the French newspaper Le Monde, he also said the euro zone's economy will grow by 2.25-2.50 per cent next year. Economists are predicting growth of under one per cent for Britain, Europe's third-biggest economy after Germany and France.

EU figures released Wednesday also showed that inflation in the euro zone fell to 0.9 per cent in November from 1.0 per cent in October.

In the 15 countries of the European Union inflation in November was 1.0 per cent from 1.1 per cent in October.

Duisenberg added that he wanted to see a stable relationship between the euro and the dollar although "the exchange

rate, as such, is not our first objective."

And in a sign of the ECB's independence from politics, Duisenberg also told Le Monde bluntly that, contrary to the impression given by France when he was appointed in May to a formal eight-year term as ECB president, he would not resign after four years to make room for French candidate Jean-Claude Trichet, governor of the Bank of France and vice president of the ECB.

Asked if he would resign, he said: "The reply is no."

Elsewhere, euro preparations moved ahead — although the head of the German police union, Norbert Spinath, warned that they had not gone far enough.

The ability to move large amounts of money around Europe and elsewhere in euros was a temptation for criminals, he said, adding that German police were not ready to cope with such activities.

Exchange Rates Wednesday, 30-12-98									
ACCESS 4848888									
CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAAR	US DOLLAR	EURO	SAUDI RIAL	BAHRAIN DINAAR	QATAR RIAL	YEMEN RIAL	OMAN RIAL	IRAN RIAL
JORDAN DINAAR	1.0000	0.1867	0.1927	1.8780	1.8389	0.1944	2.3405	0.2077	0.7080
SAUDI RIAL	5.2867	1.0000	1.0211	9.9509	9.7439	1.0302	12.4337	1.1006	3.7515
BAHRAIN DINAAR	5.1863	0.9798	1.0000	9.7454	9.5426	1.0089	12.1786	1.0778	3.6740
QATAR RIAL	0.5526	0.1025	0.1025	1.0000	0.9792	1.0305	1.2495	0.1106	0.3770
YEMEN RIAL	0.5434	0.1025	0.1025	1.0000	0.9792	1.0305	1.2495	0.1106	0.3770
OMAN RIAL	0.4262	0.0804	0.0821	0.8003	0.7837	0.0829	1.0000	0.0805	0.3077
IRAN RIAL	4.8145	0.9085	0.9278	9.0416	8.8535	0.9561	11.2975	1.0000	3.4267
LEBANON LIRA	21.4831	4.0544	4.1389	40.3448	39.5055	4.1759	50.4170	4.4521	15.2100
US DOLLAR	1.4124	1.0000	0.2722	2.6525	2.5973	0.2746	3.3143	0.2834	1.0000
EURO	0.8451	0.1591	1.0000	1.5834	1.5505	0.1638	1.9785	0.1781	0.5989
SAUDI RIAL	2.3587	0.4563	0.4547	4.4316	4.3394	0.4588	5.5373	0.4987	1.6707
BAHRAIN DINAAR	1.8308	0.3644	0.3721	3.6263	3.5508	0.3754	4.5310	0.4011	1.3871
QATAR RIAL	0.7917	0.1491	0.1526	1.4874	1.4581	0.1592	1.9785	0.2113	0.7080
YEMEN RIAL	1.6288	0.3074	0.3139	3.0589	2.9932	0.3167	3.8221	0.3383	1.1006
OMAN RIAL	2.6586	0.5017	0.5123	5.0123	4.9028	0.5169	6.2386	0.5522	1.8223
IRAN RIAL	11.3773	2.1472	2.1925	21.3663	20.9218	2.2130	26.9973	2.3531	8.0591
LEBANON LIRA	23.3662	4.4068	4.5028	43.8814	42.9685	4.5430	54.8300	4.8533	16.5433
US DOLLAR	48.7008	9.1910	9.3849	91.4589	89.5561	9.4686	114.2781	10.1133	34.4000
EURO	2.3080	0.4352	0.4444	4.3305	4.2405	0.4483	5.5176	0.5718	1.9322
SAUDI RIAL	3.9718	0.7485	0.7654	7.4588	7.3054	0.7722	9.3196	0.8249	2.8118
BAHRAIN DINAAR	2.8536	0.5585	0.5711	5.6388	5.4949	0.5718	6.9792	0.7448	2.5000
QATAR RIAL	16.8045	3.1337	3.1998	31.1830	30.5343	3.2283	38.9533	3.4488	11.7500
YEMEN RIAL	2.1915	0.4138	0.4223	4.1156	4.0300	0.4261	5.1425	0.4552	1.5516
OMAN RIAL	1.2221	0.2285	0.2316	2.2575	2.2105	0.2337	2.8207	0.2497	0.8511

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAAR									
CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN									
CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	SAUDI RIAL	BAHRAIN DINAAR	QATAR RIAL	YEMEN RIAL	OMAN RIAL	IRAN RIAL	LEBANON LIRA
US DOLLAR	1.0000	0.1867	0.1927	1.8780	1.8389	0.1944	2.3405	0.2077	0.7080
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SAUDI RIAL	5.2867	1.0000	1.0211	9.9509	9.7439	1.0302	12.4337	1.1006	3.7515
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LEBANON LIRA	21.4831	4.0544	4.1389	40.3448	39.5055	4.1759	50.4170	4.4521	15.2100

WORLD STOCK MARKETS									
STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST CLOSE	CHANGE	PRECIOUS METALS	ASK	BID	OPEN	CLOSE
FRANKFURT	DAX	5051.87	5044.77	-7.10	GOLD	268.80	267.40	268.80	267.40
PARIS	CAC 40	10255.97	10170.14	-85.83	SILVER	5.02	5.05	5.02	5.05
LONDON	FTSE 100	5841.50	5867.20	25.70	PLATINUM	347.00	349.00	347.00	349.00
NEW YORK	DJ INDUSTR	9220.99	9225.75	4.76					
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	997.06	998.00	0.94					
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	670.75	685.55	14.80					
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1241.77	1225.48	-16.29					
NEW YORK	NASDAQ	1342.17	1342.17	0.00					
NEW YORK	CAC 40	3851.10	3873.10	22.00					
FRANKFURT	COMPOSITE	4549.70	4550.20	0.50					

Ministry denies olive oil glut

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Agriculture Wednesday denied that it has caused an olive oil glut in the local market through the import of this commodity from other countries.

A ministry spokesperson said that in view of the abundant olive harvest this year, the ministry has decided to cut by half the period during which merchants can import the olive oil from other countries.

Normally merchants are allowed six months — from May until the middle of October each year — to import olive oil. This year it only allowed the import of olive oil starting Aug. 10, only half the six month normal period allowed normally for such imports, according to the spokesperson.

He said Jordan has thus imported 400 tonnes of olive oil.

The Ministry of Agriculture in coordination with the Ministry of Industry and Trade has also passed strict rules concerning the specifications of the imported olive oil in a bid to prevent profiteering and the sale of adulterated oil in the local markets, the spokesperson mentioned.

IDEAL group end-of-year celebrations

"THANK YOU very much, you have done well for a difficult year," said Tawfiq Kassar, Honorary President of IDEAL Group, in saluting the 1998 distinguished group employees at the IDEAL Awards Night 1998, during which many awards were presented for service veterans, sales achievers, profit makers, best engineers and developers and best teamworkers.

The Awards Night was preceded by iftar and followed by a Festive Ramadan Night at the Radisson SAS. The events were attended by Rudain Kassar, chairman, Karim Kassar, president, IDEAL Group company managers, Department heads, and 150 of the Groups employees.



TO MARK the Holiday Season, the Marriott Hotel has organised a series of activities for children. Not only did the Hotel organise a tour for Children from the Montessori Kindergarten to enjoy the Xmas festivities and Ramadan decorations, but it also organised a puppet show for children's entertainment, and hosted a Xmas party attended by more than 120 children at Champions. Santa Claus was there to greet and dance with the children, and hand them gifts and candy.

The Amman Marriott Choir also performed Xmas favourites in the lobby.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, SATURDAY 2, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) The action is fast and furious again, but you're right up there with the top contenders. You could even win the championship just by sheer bravado and your lightning fast reflexes. Try not to alienate a loved one in the process. Not everyone is as involved in what you're doing as you are; some might not see the point of it all.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) There are too many things to be done, and a friend is quite confused. This is probably someone who has fewer negotiating skills and a little less patience. He or she is about to fly off the handle and make a scene, but you can prevent it simply by advising caution and the patience to wait another day or so.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) This is an excellent day for wheeling and dealing. You could get the deal of the century without having to go very far for it. Could be in your very own neighbourhood. Don't take the first price that's offered. Haggle back and forth for a while. You'll not only get a huge savings, but everyone will have a great time, too.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Nerves are jangly again today. It seems hard to settle on any one topic for long. You're not the only one with this problem. It's epidemic. If you don't try to accomplish anything major, you'll do much better. Truth is, there's nothing much that really has to get done today, so why worry about it? Put everything off until tomorrow.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) All sorts of ideas are being tossed around, and you're one of the few people who has any common sense. You may have to step in and tell the others what they're attempting just isn't possible. Once they know they're off track, they could put in the changes to their plan that would actually make it work. That's how you're valuable.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Your energy level is probably high, but that's not true of everyone. It might be because you don't imbibe very heavily. You can still be compassionate for those who do, or have recently. Might as well. It's certainly not going to serve your purposes to berate them. Show by your example. Don't waste your words.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You're in a feisty mood, so go ahead and light a fire under a slowpoke. That per-

son is hanging back, not thinking he or she can join in the fun and games. Maybe this person is shy, or just doesn't know how to play. It doesn't matter. Don't take no for an answer. Get all the wallflowers out on

the floor dancing.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Fuss over friends and loved ones today. You are calm, cool and steady. Everybody else wants to be like you, and might even ask you how you're doing it. You can say it's herbal tea or meditation or spiritual enlightenment, but the truth is, you're just really lucky today. All that other stuff helps, but you have an unfair advantage.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Everybody's in the mood to make changes, some of which are pretty drastic. This is interesting, but doesn't affect you directly. For once in your life, you're providing stability to others who need it more than you do. The main thing you can tell them is to relax and get back in touch with their sense of humour. Laughter really is the best medicine.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Watch your temper today, especially with an older person. You're both convinced you're right, but the truth is that neither of you is. The solution won't be found in either of your opinions. Its somewhere above and beyond all this squabbling, and that's where you need to direct your attention.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) It looks like money is coming into your account. The bad news is that you have to work on a Saturday. Make sure you charge time and half or double time. You could get it, because there's a panic situation out there. You could also make a fabulous name for yourself if you can calm these folks down before they hurt themselves.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Don't get caught up in somebody else's problem. Continue to be nurturing and loving. Its your gift, the essence of your being, and today it could come in very handy. Don't try to solve people's problems for them. That's part of their education. If you can help them stay calm enough to think clearly, they'll do it themselves.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Business transaction
- Beauty parlor
- Proceeded slowly but surely
- Algerian port
- Recumbent
- Similar
- Lap of luxury
- Nastase of tennis
- Most prone to be impudent
- "Casey at the Bat" poet
- Director Spike
- Particular bias
- Social blunders
- English cheeses
- Stirs to anger
- School collars and jackets
- Out fairways
- Formerly owned
- Toss
- Blackthorn
- Contagious melody, briefly
- Chicago mayor
- Semblance
- Reinforcements around poles
- Poem of 14 lines
- Barble and Ken, e.g.
- Gilliam of baseball
- Ancient
- Star-shaped
- Mineo and Maglie
- White-and-yellow flower
- Landed
- Handle capably
- Buri on a tree
- Go by
- City near Avignon
- Raison d'

DOWN

- Booths
- Vicinity
- Felles
- Eve's grandson
- Lively outings
- Left hand
- Among the missing
- Single
- Baby bird
- To 5 'co-star
- Dust-bowl migrant
- Sambal, e.g.
- Lines of marchers
- Holbrook and Linden
- Rock-strawn
- Brusque
- Congregation separator
- Iris in heraldry
- Dined
- Eyefold swellings
- Hangman's knot
- Endearing
- French shoes
- Stumble to the ground
- Our star
- Flat
- Elliott of "M*A*S*H"
- Perches
- Splitted mounts
- Technique
- Immediately
- Celebration
- Appear to be
- Seneca or Huron
- "She Sweet"
- Peter the Great's title
- Jane
- Noon on a sundial

Peanuts



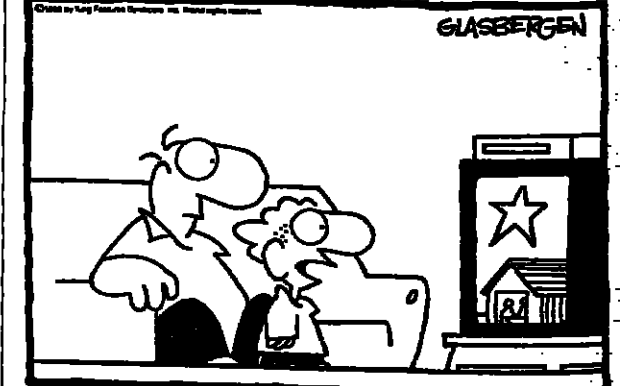
Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"No room at the inn, so they made her give birth in a barn? I bet her lawyers made a pile on that case!"

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LASIE

JABON

RETHEN

PITYS

OUT OF

Ans: LASIE, JABON, RETHEN, PITYS

Yesterday's Jumbles: GRAIN CHAOS KERNEL CHROME — How the scientist described the ancient stone — A ROCK OF AGES

In absence of NBA talks, rhetoric heats up

NEW YORK (AP) — While the U.S. National Basketball Association commissioner worked from his home in Colorado and his deputy was off in Florida, NBA players and agents stewed on the telephone Tuesday as the lockout approached its half-year anniversary.

"If the league doesn't want to play, then we don't need to wait until Jan. 7. Just cancel the season," said Jerome Stanley, an agent who represents five players in the lower- and middle-income ranges. "But if they're not going to cancel the season, then crank it back up. We don't need any more gesturing or grandstanding, just do some tradeoffs and end the thing."

Stanley and two other agents held a conference call with reporters while players participated on a different conference call with union leadership.

Commissioner David Stern, meantime, was still vacationing in Aspen, and deputy commissioner Russ Granik was in Florida with his family. Neither is expected back in New York until the

new year.

The lockout, essentially a strike by the owners, is now entering its sixth month.

The league has scheduled a Board of Governors meeting for Jan. 7, and Stern and Granik have said they will recommend canceling the season if no agreement has been reached by that date.

The league says it has made its final offer, and no further talks are scheduled.

A hearing will be held Wednesday in Houston federal court on a lawsuit filed by players Nick Van Exel, Marcus Camby and Reggie Slater charging USA Basketball and the NBA with denying them clearance to play in Europe.

The lockout, essentially a strike by the owners, is now entering its sixth month.

"No matter where the thing ends, the league is going to end up with a good, very good, deal — almost a dream deal," Stanley said. "If you took the

same deal and offered it to baseball and football owners, they'd hop all over it."

"This is first sports industry to cap top end salaries," Stanley said. "Calculate how much money the Los Angeles Lakers would save by not having to pay Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant what they would have had to pay under the old deal. That money has already been transferred. That's the offer we're making."

Stanley and agents Keith Glass and Steve Kauffman said the lockout had been "scripted, orchestrated and pre-planned" by the owners.

Kauffman said he was beginning to believe that the league doesn't want a season, and Glass called Stern's negotiating conduct "disgraceful."

Under a league-wide gag order, general managers, like all NBA employees, are forbidden from discussing the lockout. Violators face seven-figure fines and the loss of draft picks.

Dakar Rally Shinozuka and Henri look to regain crown

GRANADA (AFP) — The Japanese-French Mitsubishi driving team of Kenjiro Shinozuka and Henri Magne will be out for revenge when the legendary test of endurance the Dakar Rally gets underway here on Friday.

Shinozuka and Henri, who took the crown in 1997 but lost out to the all-French pairing of Jean-Pierre Fontenay and Gilles Picard last year, face a daunting 16-day drive over 9,062 kilometres across six countries and some stiff opposition from arch manufacturing rivals Nissan before the finish in Dakar.

The Nissan line-up includes Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel, who has switched to cars after winning a record six rallies on a motorbike, although perhaps their main challenge will come from Thierry de Lavergne and his teammate Jacky Dubois.

Peterhansel's absence from the motorcycling discipline leaves the way open for the Austrian manufacturer KTM, who supply 78 of the 164

competitors, although it is a very open race as to who will succeed the Frenchman.

His absence gives veteran Italian Edi Orioli the chance to win his fifth Dakar Rally, the last one back in 1996, while his compatriot Fabrizio Meoni will be hoping to make the jump from runner-up last time to champion this year.

However, there are a couple of new kids on the block who will be laying down a challenge for a new order such as Germany's Dirk Von Zitzewitz and Alfie Cox of South Africa.

The remainder of the 304 competitors contest the truck discipline, among them four-time winner and reigning champion Karel Loprais, driving a Tatra.

Greek soccer strike deals blow to already reeling sport

ATHENS (AP) — Just when Greek soccer fans hoped the worst was over, they learned the new year will bring even more anguish: a soccer club strike in a sport reeling from fan violence and corruption allegations.

All first, second and third division games planned for this weekend were called off Tuesday due to a strike called by the Association of Professional Soccer Clubs, or EPAE.

The association, which organises Greece's top three soccer leagues, is demanding 300 million drachmas (more than \$1 million) that it says are owed by the state agency that organises the weekly soccer pools.

The association has also demanded an increase in the percentage of pool profits it receives. But the agency, known as OPAP, has refused to budge.

Unless the agency pays the 300 million drachmas by Jan. 4, EPAE has threatened to extend its strike to cover the weekend of Jan. 9-11.

This would force a second postponement of the matches. "A hungry bear can't dance. We will play if OPAP gives us the money," said Petros Theodoridis, the owner of the first-division Iraklis team, according to the daily Sportime newspaper.

EPAE's strike appears to be further reducing the public's interest in soccer — which is losing ground in Greece to basketball.

"It will not be the end of the world if there is no soccer for a few weeks," the Athens daily Kathimerini quoted Sports Minister Andreas Fouras as saying.

His comments seem to reflect the feelings of many soccer followers, who have shown no signs of being troubled by the prospect of two weekends without matches.

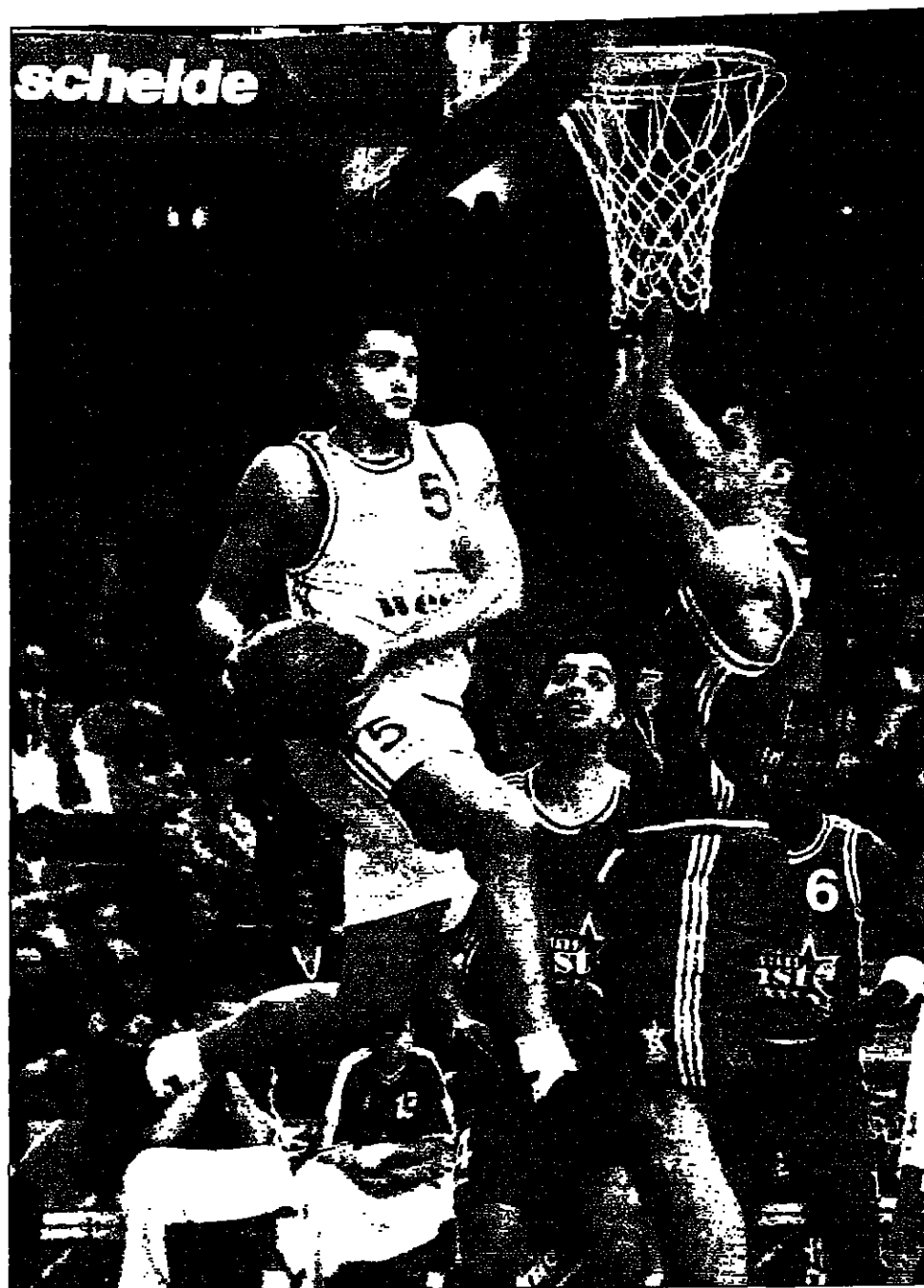
The strike comes towards the end of the holiday season, with most people taking advantage of the long weekend to head to the countryside.

But a recent series of violent fan clashes and allegations of bribery and corruption have already diminished the game's appeal to mainstream followers.

Sparked by accusations of biased refereeing, a wave of vandalism and violence began in November. It led to harsh criticism of the sport in a parliamentary committee report. "Our country is being internationally defamed at the time it is preparing to organize the Olympic Games," the report said.

Rioting fans during a first division match on Dec. 8 between Olympiakos Piraeus and its main rival Panathinaikos left a stream of burnt cars, battered bystanders and damaged seats from the stadium set to host the 2004 Olympic Games.

Last year, nearly half the country's 300 lawmakers issued a statement complaining soccer "is being led to decline and extermination."



Predrag Danilovic (L) of the 'Team West' jumps as he tries to score being challenged by Marco Milic (R) of 'Team East' as the best basketball players from all over the world, playing in European teams, come together in Berlin for the yearender match of the 'Euro Stars' (AFP photo)

Dino Radja leads East to Euro All-Star win

BERLIN (AP) — Former Celtics player Dino Radja and Dejan Bodiroga Tuesday hit key baskets down the stretch Tuesday as the East beat the West in the European All-Star game.

It was Bodiroga, although he had several former NBA players as teammates, who settled the 104-98 East win in a game played under near NBA-like rules including a 24-second clock.

The Yugoslav forward, playing for Greece's Panathinaikos Athens, scored 15 points for the East and rattled off six straight points as the East trailed 93-91 with 3:20 left.

Like everyone else, Bodiroga was enthusiastic about the new rules European basketball's governing body, FIBA, is thinking of implementing.

"They're great, it makes the game quicker. A player has a chance to display all his abilities on court," said Bodiroga.

Radja, his teammate at the Athens club, led the East with 17 points and dunked twice with time running out to kill the West's last hopes.

Carlton Myers of Italy's TeamSystem Bologna was the game MVP after hitting for 20 points for the West and adding a little razzle-

dazzle to the match.

Former Miami Heat player Predrag Danilovic, now suited up for Italy's European champions Kinder Bologna, added 19.

For a while it appeared Myers and Danilovic, who had 16 of his points in the second half, would break the West jinx. The East has now won all three editions of the all-star contest.

Danilovic poured in nine points as the West went on an 18 to 10 spurt to start the second half that put them up 69-65.

Myers then took over by firing three. The son of Italian and English parents also added a little show biz to a match that lacked sizzle when he found himself wide-open at the 3-point line in the third quarter.

"Knowing I won the 3-point contest at halftime, I asked the crowd if they thought I was going to hit it or miss it," said Myers, who sank the shot to the crowd's delight.

A disappointing crowd of 7,500 in the 9,000-seat Max Schmeling Hall came hoping to see spectacular moves and often found the European players playing hard-nosed defence.

"I think the European mentality is to play to win

every game," said FIBA spokesman Florian Wanninger.

"The NBA players are willing not to play defence for a couple of quarters to put on a show."

The German crowd wanted to see dunks, exploding every time a player put on a little show of power.

But Conrad McRae of Fenerbahce Istanbul drew the biggest crowd when he missed a power dunk that shook the rim.

The shot would have given the East a 82-81 lead with eight minutes left.

The small crowd, after sellouts the previous two years at Tel Aviv and Istanbul, proved FIBA still has a ways to go in selling a European All-Star game.

"It wasn't a sell-out but I thought it was a pretty good show."

I had fun anyhow," said Myers.

FIBA also couldn't find a major German TV station to televise the game live even though the contest was played in the country.

The new rules also included playing quarters instead of halves and forcing teams to move the ball out of the backcourt in eight seconds instead of 10.

Dugarry move to Juventus called off

MARSEILLE (AFP) — French World Cup star Christophe Dugarry's move to Juventus called off here on Wednesday.

Marseille coach René Courbis told AFP Dugarry would stay in France following a week of speculation.

"Christophe Dugarry is for sale," he said. "After talking with our club president, he has decided to stay until the end of the season."

It was earlier reported the 26-year-old striker was expected to move to Italy within days.

According to a report in Tuesday's Gazzetta dello Sport Dugarry, with a price tag of nine million dollars, would make his debut for the Serie A club on January 6 against AC Milan.

But later Juventus director general Luciano Moggi admitted there were still hurdles to overcome.

The Italian club already has two French World Cup stars, Zinedine Zidane and Didier Deschamps, on its books.

The failure of the deal could be linked to another Juventus target, Galatasaray striker Hakan Sukur. He rejected their approach on Monday only to reconsider 24 hours later.

Dugarry had already had one stint in Italy, with AC Milan. He was expected to step into the position left vacant at Juventus by Alessandro Del Piero, out for the season after surgery on his left knee.

PSG defender joins Gullit's Magpies

NEWCASTLE (AP) — Didier Domi joined Newcastle from Paris Saint Germain on Wednesday and is set to make his Premier League debut Jan. 9 against high-flying Chelsea, former club of Magpies manager Ruud Gullit.

The 20-year-old defender, who has lost his place on the PSG lineup, signed a 4-1/2-year contract worth 3.25 million pounds (\$5.4 million). The fee will rise to 4 million (\$6.7 million) depending on the number of appearances he makes for his new club.

"I'm young but I'm very happy to be at Newcastle. Domi said on his arrival at St. James' Park. "The Premier League is very good and the truth will be shown when I play. It's there that you will see my true worth."

Newcastle manager Ruud Gullit, who is trying to revive the team's fortunes after 18 months of lackluster performances, said:

"Domi would fit in neatly in the left side of defence."

"He's a very good positional player," he said. "Of course in England that is something we are not used to because in England people want to have players who can tackle and run. But it's also important to have the right position because if you are in the right position, you don't have to tackle."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TARIK HIRSHI
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DON'T BE A MASOCHIST

Both vulnerable. North deals.

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♥ Q 8 4
♦ A 5 4
♣ J 8 4 3

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♦ Q 9 8 3
♣ Q 6 2

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Steffi Graf

Graf to miss Federation Cup

BONN (AFP) — Former World No. 1 tennis star Steffi Graf is unlikely to line up for Germany in the Federation Cup, her advisor said here on Wednesday.

Hans Engert said the 29-year-old had been unable to forge an agreement with the German tennis federation over terms.

Germany take on Japan in the event in Hamburg on April 24 and 25.

But federation secretary general Gunter Sanders said he had not given up hope and talks were continuing. "We are negotiating," he said. "It would be great if Steffi played."

Graf is coming back to her best after a string of injuries. She ended the season with three tournament wins and saw her world ranking jump from 97th to 12th in a couple of months.

Juve not interested in Turkish striker

ISTANBUL (AP) — Italian club Juventus is no longer interested in signing Turkish striker Hakan Sukur from Galatasaray, reports said Wednesday.

Celalettin Bilgic, a liaison official in Istanbul for Juventus, told the Anadolu news agency that the Italian club has withdrawn its reported \$12-15 million transfer bid for Sukur.

Private NTV television speculated that Juve was put off by Sukur's hesitation in accepting the transfer and by his financial demands.

Sukur rebuffed the Juve offer last week but later accepted it on condition that he is paid \$2 million a year, reports said.

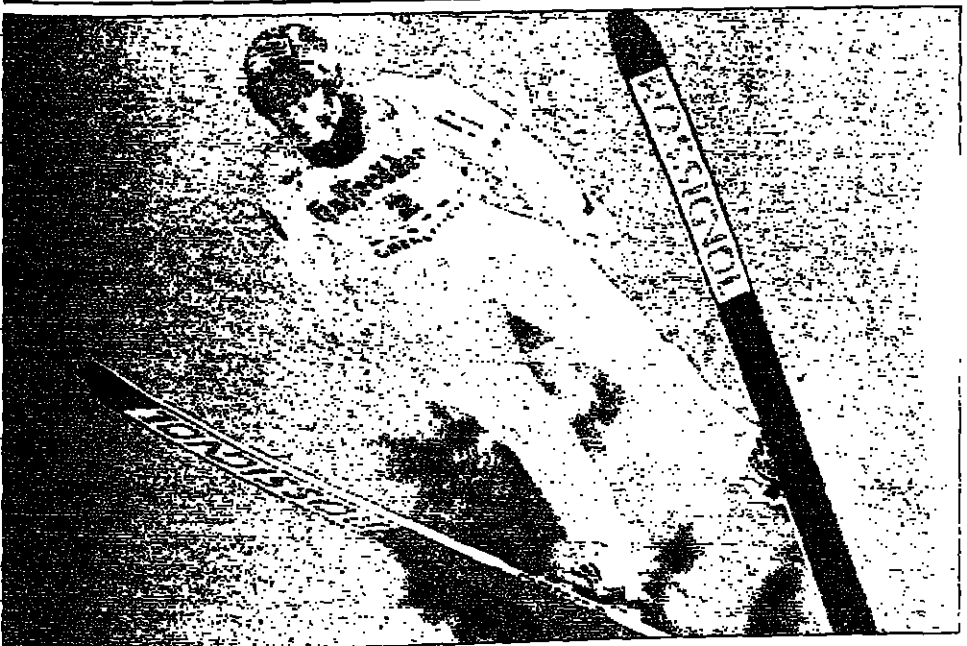
His reluctance to go back to Italy partly stemmed from a diplomatic rift between Turkey and Italy over Rome's refusal to extradite a Kurdish rebel leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Committee to review Asian Games results, doping case

AMMAN — The Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) has decided to form a special committee to evaluate the participation of the national teams at the Asian Games, which were held in Bangkok Dec. 6-20, 1998, and investigate the sports doping issue. Minister of Culture and Youth Tala' Sata' an AJ Hassan has authorized JOC Vice-President Moufraq Al Fawwaz and ministry Secretary-General Thouqan Obeidat to form the committee that will study the Jordan's participation alongside 40 other countries. Four of the five medals won by Jordanian athletes were in taekwondo while in the rest of the sports the athletes failed to come close to their own records. Jordan also produced the first out of four doping cases at the Games when Ayed Khawaldeh failed a drug test after setting an Arab record in weightlifting although he finished seventh overall. Khawaldeh is expected to be suspended for two years by the international federation and will therefore miss the Amman Pan-Arab Games next August.



Martin Schmitt of Germany soars during the ski jumping competition in Oberstdorf. Schmitt, who also leads in the world cup standings, won ahead of Andreas Goldberg of Austria and Noriaki Kasai of Japan. The event is part of the traditional 'Four Hills Competition' which takes place in the German ski resorts of Oberstdorf and Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and the Austrian ski resorts of Innsbruck and Bischofshofen (Reuters photo)

Schmitt dominates ski jumping

OBERSTHOF, Germany (AP) — Germany's Martin Schmitt Wednesday reaffirmed his dominance this year in ski jumping, out-leaping Austria's Andreas Goldberg to capture the first of the Four Hills tournaments.

The 20-year-old Schmitt compiled 244.8 points, edging Goldberg at 242.8, to win his fifth event in seven outings this season.

The sudden popularity of Schmitt in Germany, who has emerged from nowhere this season, lured 25,000 spectators to see the first event of the 47-year-old tournament.

"The mood here was crazy, it was fun," said Schmitt. "I'm sure the attention will get even worse, but I think I know when to turn off."

Japan's Noriaki Kasai finished third at 241.7 points while Andreas Widhoelzli faded to fourth after soaring 124.0 metres on his first leap.

Schmitt's second clean jump of 115.5 metres, as a backwind died and dropped distances, thrust him into the lead. His first attempt had been 120.0.

Widhoelzli, leaping afterwards, failed to keep pace and flew only 109.5 metres.

"He knew he had to jump at least 111, 112 metres. He probably put himself under too much pressure," said Schmitt.

The other three events will be held at Garmisch-Partenkirchen on New Year's Day, Innsbruck on Jan. 3 and Bischofshofen on Jan. 6.

The Four Hills tournament is regarded as ski jumping's most prestigious prize outside of the Olympics and world championships.

New tennis system: Advantage ... TV!

PARIS (AFP) — An experimental "No Ad" tennis scoring system will be introduced at a professional tournament for the first time next week to try and make the game more attractive to television.

The new system, being tried out at the Grasse satellite tournament in France starting on Monday, will see the existing advantage rule put aside, with the first player to win a point taking the game after the score has reached 40-40.

The receiver, however, will be able to choose the side of the court his opponent must serve to.

The French tennis federation, encouraged by the International Tennis Federation, will experiment with the new system in eight satellite tournaments in January and February.

The idea is to standardise the length of matches to fit in with television schedules. Studies show matches could be shortened by up to 10 per cent.

Tennis has remained faithful to its original rules, drawn up in 1877, with only one major change — the introduction of the tie-break in 1974.

Inquiries to follow Australian race disaster

SYDNEY, Australia (AP) — Two inquiries will be held into the deadly Sydney-to-Hobart yacht race amid claims that race organisers knew of the potential danger 24 hours before the fleet was decimated by a massive storm.

Four bodies were recovered and rescuers have given up hope of finding two others presumed drowned in the worst death toll in the 54-year history of the event. Winds up to 90 mph (144 kph) and waves 35 feet (11 metres) high carved a path of destruction through the annual race this week.

A New South Wales government Coroner's inquiry has been ordered to probe the loss of life while the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, the race organiser, will also investigate the disaster.

The club defended its decision to appoint immediate past commodore Peter Bush to hold the inquiry, saying no independent body could do as good a job.

The inquiries are certain to focus on the weather and what information was passed on to the crew aboard the 115 yachts.

Seventy yachts had withdrawn from a race wrecked by the massive waves and rescuers saved about 50 sailors from seven stricken craft.

The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper Wednesday quoted an unnamed source from the weather bureau as saying the yacht club and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority were given early notice of the approaching storm.

"We gave them 24 hours notice and that is a long lead time for weather at sea," the source said. "Most times 12 hours is considered to be satisfactory."

The source said the information was passed on two hours after the start of the race at Sydney Harbour on Dec. 26. The paper said the weather bureau was concerned by reports that the fleet was given no warning about the intensity of the storms.

Richard Winning, who captained the yacht Winston Churchill which sank, killing three, admitted he had been told that conditions would be bad.

"I think we were given adequate information, yes," Winning said.

Bush defended the yacht club holding its own inquiry, which will be conducted in private with the report made public later.

"I don't think by any stretch of the imagination that you want to assume that this is not going to be an objective review," Bush said Wednesday.

"The single most important aspect all the way along in this process, in the history of this race, is to make sure that we make this event and all our yacht racing as safe as humanly possible."

He said the inquiry would consider whether or not the race, won by United States maxi Sayonara, should have been abandoned when the storm hit.

"We'll certainly look at that, but it's a very difficult thing under all circumstances to say look, the race should have been called off," Bush said.

"Had we called the race off when we were aware of the strength of those conditions, little else could have happened other than what happened because these guys were already on the race course."

"And for us to say, 'OK guys all stop racing and go home,' they're still out

there, they've still got 100 or 30 or 50 miles (160 or 48 or 80 kilometres) to get to shore and it's not actually as simple as that."

Current club commodore Hugo van Kretschmar said the inquiry would seek input from the weather bureau and the Maritime Authority.

Van Kretschmar said he had opposed an abandonment of the race because of the conditions and said it was run under international rules leaving the responsibility with the individual skipper.

"The unsinkable and unrollable yacht, like the Titanic, doesn't exist," Van Kretschmar said.

The bodies of two members of the Winston Churchill, Jim Lawler and Michael Bannister, were recovered from Bass Strait on Tuesday. Two others, Bruce Guy and Phil Skeggs from Business Post Naiaid, were killed when their yacht rolled over Sunday during the peak of the storms.

British Olympic Games sailor Glyn Charles, 33, and Australian John Dean, 47, are presumed dead.

The Maritime Authority abandoned its search Tuesday afternoon, saying that was an indication no hope was held for the pair.

Dean had told his family that when he died he wanted his ashes spread at sea.

"It looks like he has got his wish. At least he died doing something he loved," said Dean's 15-year-old son Peter.

The crew on fifth-placed Nokia held a minute's silence when it arrived in Hobart late Tuesday.

Survivors recount Sydney-Hobart race tragedy

HOBART (AP) — One survivor tells of how his friend and skipper died in his arms from a heart attack in the flooded cabin of a stricken Sydney-to-Hobart race yacht.

Another says he almost drowned as he struggled to free himself from the deadly trap of a safety harness, which drowned a crewmate, after a giant wave overturned their yacht.

Sailors Steve Walker and Rob Matthews were giving the first accounts Wednesday of their nightmare hours on the Tasmanian 12-metre Business Post Naiaid after it was disabled by huge seas on Sunday night in Bass Strait during the annual race.

Four race sailors died and two are missing and presumed drowned.

Business Post Naiaid owner-skipper Bruce Guy, 51, and crew member Phil Skeggs, 35, who lived in the same street in the

Launceston, Tasmania suburb of Riverside, died.

An emotional Walker, who broke down several times, said the weather steadily worsened during Sunday afternoon and night.

During the early evening, a massive breaking wave rolled their boat 360 degrees.

The mast, windows and cabin were broken and four crew went over the side in their harnesses but were rescued.

They sent out a Mayday, which was acknowledged, cleared the shrouds from the propeller and started their engine intending to head for the closest land.

"It was very difficult to keep on course dodging the waves," Walker said. "We had two on deck in one-hour shifts, one giving compass headings and the other steering."

About 11 p.m. that night, another wave rolled the boat,

but this time it stayed upside down for four to five minutes.

"When the boat initially rolled I thought it would do like it did the first time and just pop back up again. So for the first 10 to 15 seconds I made no attempt to unhook my harness because I didn't want to leave the boat," said Matthews.

"Then when it stayed inverted I started to try to get my harness undone which I found really difficult even though I had the hooks on my chest because I was being pulled every which way and I was right at the end of the harness and I was using all my strength."

"I had nearly run out of breath when the boat was lifted by another wave and I just sucked enough air to keep me going for another 10 or 15 seconds. I don't know how long, and I forced the harness off."

"Below decks was horrendous," Walker said. "There was flotsam everywhere and

the water was surging like being on a surf beach."

About 3 a.m. more massive waves washed away the liferafts which had been lowered to one side of the boat.

"We were too exhausted to do anything about it," Walker said. "Everyone was bashed and bruised."

A search aircraft found them at 7.30 a.m. Monday and about half an hour later a helicopter winched the seven survivors to safety.

The two bodies were secured on the boat and left.

"We didn't want to leave Phil and Bruce but we were glad to get off that boat," Walker said.

The boat, with the two bodies aboard, was towed to shore on Wednesday.

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UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, requires an:

Administrative Assistant, Grade 11 (AVN/21/98)

The incumbent of this position is responsible for providing administrative, secretarial and clerical support to the Director of Administration and Finance, HQ (Gaza). **REQUIREMENTS:** Successful completion of full secondary education; completion of post secondary business or secretarial course of at least one year's duration; demonstrated ability to type at 50 WPM, and to take shorthand at an acceptable speed; ability to operate computer software such as MS/Word, Word Perfect and Quattro Pro. Able and willing to work later than normal working hours on a regular basis. 2) Six years secretarial/administrative experience including at least two years as personal assistant or senior secretary to a senior executive in a large commercial or industrial organisation. 3) Fluency in spoken and written English. Qualified candidates may be invited for tests and interviews.

REMUNERATION: The post is graded at level 11 and carries a monthly Base Salary starting from \$718.40. **APPLICATIONS:** For applicants selected from outside Gaza, a Special Expatriate Allowance will be payable. Applications quoting (AVN/21/98) may be sent by mail or fax before 21 January 1999 to: Recruitment Officer, UNRWA HQ Gaza City, P.O. Box 371, Gaza City. Fax No. + 972 7 6777 555, from where additional information can be requested.

Turkey says Syria meeting Kurdish rebel commitment

ANKARA (R) — Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem said on Wednesday neighbouring Syria was fulfilling a pledge to end Kurdish rebel activity on its soil that was made after a stand-off and Turkish threats of military action.

Syria agreed to halt its alleged backing for Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) guerrillas in an accord signed in October

in the southern Turkish town of Adana.

"There is an improvement in the implementation of the Adana agreement as was expected and desired," Cem told a news conference.

Earlier this month, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel said Turkey was seeking closer Syrian adherence to the deal.

Cem did not specify in which areas the improvement

had been made. Syria has pledged not to allow the PKK to train, recruit, spread propaganda or raise money on its territory.

But Cem also added: "I cannot say the whole existence of the separatist organisation has been rooted out."

The deal forced PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to leave Damascus, his base for several years. Ocalan went to Russia,

then Italy, triggering a diplomatic dispute between NATO allies Ankara and Rome.

Turkey wants to extradite Ocalan and try him for leading the PKK's 14-year armed campaign for Kurdish self rule in Turkey that has claimed more than 29,000 lives.

Italy's constitution bars it from sending any suspect to a country, such as Turkey, where the death penalty exists.

Iraq may delay wheat tender result

PARIS (R) — Iraq may delay its decision on a Dec. 24 tender for 50,000 tonnes of wheat until next week, European exporters said on Wednesday.

The result had been due on Thursday. "[Iraq] has asked for some extra time to reflect," said one. "They'll give an answer at the start of next week, Monday or Tuesday."

Some exporters said they had heard nothing from Baghdad about a postponement, but noted that communication problems were upsetting regular contact with Iraqi grain authorities.

The military confrontation between Iraq and the United States has fuelled frantic speculation among grain traders over the outcome of the tender, which was geared towards French wheat for February/March shipment but did not exclude other origins.

Traders interpreted Iraq's preference for French wheat as a possible snub to U.S. and

Australian suppliers in the light of the recent U.S. air strikes and the fact that the chief United Nations arms inspector, Richard Butler, is Australian.

But exporters said on Wednesday that talk of the delayed tender result came amid rumours that Iraq could be separately buying a substantial quantity of wheat from Australia. "There is still a chance the result will come out tomorrow but it sounds more likely that Iraq will postpone its decision until next week," said an industry source.

"There's a very good chance Iraq has already bought a large quantity of Australian wheat," Australia's monopoly wheat exporter AWB has said.

It had successful wheat sales talks with Iraq last week, but gave no further details. It rejected fears that Baghdad could shun Australian wheat after Butler's report on Iraq's non-compliance with inspections was used to justify the bombings.

Yemen hostages killed during assault

LONDON (AFP) — The Western hostages who died in Yemen were killed during the security forces' assault on their kidnappers' encampment, one of the survivors told AFP Wednesday from Aden.

The account by Briton David Holmes contradicts that of Yemeni authorities, who insist they only intervened after the kidnappers started killing some of the hostages.

He said reports "that the bandits had turned on the hostages, was not the sequence of events."

Britain has already demanded a full explanation of the events from Yemeni authorities, after specifically asking for no action to be taken which would endanger the lives of the hostages. "The issue is whether the shooting was triggered by a bungled rescue attempt or whether the Yemeni authorities knew that hostages were already being killed and therefore moved in," said Foreign Office minister Baroness Symons.

She said Britain would be "extremely concerned" if it emerged that the hostages were killed as a direct result of the security forces' action.

Holmes, 64, was among a group of five hostages being used as human shields by the kidnappers in Tuesday's clash, a day after the total of 16 Westerners — 12 Britons, two Australians and two Americans — were abducted

German hostages freed

BONN (R) — Germany said on Wednesday that four of its nationals released by kidnappers in Yemen were in good health and were on their way to the Yemeni capital Sanaa to be flown home. Foreign ministry spokesman Martin Erdmann said the tourist group kidnapped by tribesmen on Dec. 6 would arrive in Sanaa at around 2100 GMT. He told Reuters the group would be flown out of the country at the earliest opportunity, but no time had yet been set.

in southern Yemen.

"We were utterly exposed. We were just sitting ducks," he added. "I never thought there was one chance in a million of us surviving."

It was only when the abductors realised they were losing the battle that they began to turn on the hostages, Holmes said. He could not say if any of the tourists were killed by their captors.

Earlier in Aden, the region's security chief had told reporters the four hostages were murdered by their kidnappers and not from the guns of security forces.

Netanyahu urges Likud ministers not to defect

(Continued from page 1)

Asked Wednesday what message he had for Mordechai and Livnat, Netanyahu said: "Stay in your [political] home."

Israeli President Ezer Weizman, meanwhile, came under fire after the Haaretz daily reported that he had told visitors Barak and Shahak should join forces, presumably to be in a better position to beat Netanyahu. The job of president in Israel is largely ceremonial and he is expected to remain above the political fray.

Weizman did not comment on the Haaretz report, but said Wednesday that he would try

everything in his power to get the peace agreement with the Palestinians back on track. "My message today is that peace is paramount," Weizman said.

"I have limitations... and people would like to limit me more," he added, referring to the restrictions of his office and the most recent criticism. Netanyahu froze implementation of the Wye River land-for-security agreement last month, citing Palestinian violations of the accord.

Barak and Shahak are staunch supporters of the peace agreements with the Palestinians, and while still in the army, were involved in the peace talks.

Voices in the Wilderness says will not pay fine

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A Chicago-based organisation facing a \$120,000 fine for violating U.S. sanctions laws on Iraq told the government Wednesday it will not pay.

The group, "Voices in the Wilderness," which was organised in opposition to the economic embargo of Iraq, was joined at a news conference by church leaders who denounced the international embargo as a war crime.

"I think the leaders of my country could be put on trial for war crimes," Archbishop Thomas Gumbleton of the Roman Catholic diocese of Detroit, Michigan, said at a news conference.

The U.S. Treasury Department notified "Voices in the Wilderness" on Dec. 3 of

the fine after the group sent several shipments of goods and medical supplies to Iraq without seeking a licence.

In addition, four members of the organisation have been notified that they face individual fines of up to \$12,000.

Spokeswoman Kathy Kelly said the group had intentionally refused to apply for the licence because of its principled opposition to the U.N. embargo that has been imposed on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait that led to the Gulf War.

"With respect to the enforcement of this embargo, we are conscientious objectors," said Kelly in a letter to the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control delivered Wednesday.

King Hussein to meet Clinton next week

(Continued from page 1)

"We will first depart for Washington, D.C. where we will stay for a few days before leaving for London, and then, God willing, for Amman, to be in the dear homeland with my dear people and family," King Hussein told the Regent in a letter.

Meanwhile, preparations for nationwide celebrations of the King's homecoming started in earnest, officials said.

"Each ministry had been preparing its own programme for celebrating the important event," the official said.

He said that on this time the celebrations will be different

from those 1992 when King Hussein returned home from Mayo Clinic after removing a cancerous kidney.

"All preparations are pending the announcement of the exact date of His Majesty's homecoming," said the official.

Jordan Television on Tuesday evening showed Jordanians expressing joy and happiness over the good news of the King's recovery.

The press on Wednesday was filled with comments welcoming the good news.

Jordan Radio and Television extended their live broadcasts until 3:45 a.m., receiving congratulatory phone calls from all

over the world.

Local daily newspapers, which used the King's recovery news as main headlines, were decorated with coloured pictures of the King and the Regent.

Also yesterday, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, President of the Senate Zeid Rifai, Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdul Hadi Majali, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Marei Kaabneh sent cables to the King voicing joy for the good news about the King's full recovery.

In his cable Tarawneh extended the government's

congratulations to the King and said the government joins all Jordanians in praying to God, thankful to the Almighty for His Mercy and blessing.

Tarawneh lauded the King's wise leadership, saying that the King "has taught us values of patience, justice and humanity."

Rifai said the day on which the news about the King's recovery was broadcast is one of the most beautiful days for the nation.

Lauding the King's attributes and patience, Rifai said: "We have learnt from King Hussein more about the meanings of patience, honesty and loyalty," adding that "these values will

serve as a beacon guiding our march to serve the nation and advance its cause."

Majali pledged the Lower House's allegiance to the King's leadership, saying that the House will follow in the footsteps of King Hussein in fostering the values of pride, justice, freedom and respect for democracy and human rights.

He concluded that the principles of dignity, freedom, and justice, enshrined in the principles of the Great Arab Revolt will eventually dominate.

Kaabneh expressed happiness for the King's recovery and said the Armed Forces have been impatiently waiting for the king's return home.



RAFTING SANTAS: Dressed as Santa Claus, five members of the rafting club 'Cetina' from the small Adriatic town of Omis near Split, Croatia, during their last outing of the year on Tuesday, on the River Cetina just a few miles north of Omis (AP photo)

Israel delays departure of Egyptian plane from Gaza

CAIRO (AFP) — Israeli security officials delayed the takeoff of an Egyptian plane from Gaza airport for a couple of hours Wednesday while they searched Palestinian passengers aboard the aircraft, airport officials said.

The incident occurred a day after Israel accused the Palestinian National Authority of breaching security arrangements at the recently opened airport.

"The plane's pilot, Amr Ibrahim, was preparing for takeoff when he was surprised by the Israeli authorities'

refusal to give him the go-ahead even though the flight was part of twice-weekly Cairo-Gaza links, airport officials said.

Palestinian passengers on the aircraft said they were "searched with a fine-tooth comb by Israeli security servicemen who did not check the plane itself."

Ibrahim said he intended "to submit a report to Egyptian officials on the circumstances" of the incident, but refused to comment on it further.

The plane was later allowed

to depart and arrived in Cairo two hours late.

Aboard the plane were 10 crew members and 55 passengers, most of them Palestinians headed for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for the Umra (lesser pilgrimage).

The Israeli foreign ministry said Tuesday that Israeli security men had been prevented Sunday from examining luggage carried in an Egyptian executive jet used by the Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in "a flagrant violation of articles in the agreement" on security at the airport.

Iraq and U.S. clash; U.S. denies plane shot down

(Continued from page 1)

"We can say that we successfully engaged three (Iraqi) targets. We don't know to what level the success was," said Major Joe LaMarca, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Florida, which oversees operations in the Gulf region.

The United States strongly rejected Iraqi claims a U.S. or British plane was shot down on Wednesday. A similar claim was made by Iraq after Monday's clash in the northern exclusion zone, which the United States also denied.

An Iraqi military spokesman, quoted by the Iraqi News Agency, said Iraqi air defences fired ground-to-air missiles against hostile planes on Wednesday and one was

"almost certainly shot down."

"That's nonsense," said U.S. National Security Council spokesman David Leavy. "And I hope the Iraqi propaganda machine will take a day off for New Year's."

Leavy said Clinton spoke to Yeltsin for 40 minutes and that the two leaders discussed their differences over U.S.-led military action against Iraq. He said Yeltsin "stated his views, but the president explained why force was necessary."

It was the first time Clinton and Yeltsin had spoken since U.S. and British air strikes on Iraqi targets earlier this month, which drew sharp protests from Moscow and led to an escalation of tension between Iraq and the United States.

Wednesday's clash was the second this week between U.S. and Iraqi forces in the northern and southern Iraqi no-fly zones, which Baghdad has declared illegal and does not recognise.

On Monday, U.S. warplanes from Incirlik air base in Turkey attacked an Iraqi anti-aircraft site in the north after it launched surface-to-air missiles at the jets. U.S. officials said no planes were damaged in either clash this week.

LaMarca told Reuters by telephone from MacDill Air Force Base in Florida that U.S. and British aircraft were conducting a routine patrol at about 1:30 a.m. EST (0630 GMT) on Wednesday when the Iraqis fired between six and eight surface-to-air missiles from a site southwest of Tallil in southern Iraq.

The British pilots, who were

flying on the same mission in the southern no-fly zone with the Americans, first detected the Iraqi missiles and the Americans retaliated.

"In response to that unprovoked attack, we responded by firing two HARM missiles (anti-radar missiles) and dropped a number of GBU-12 500 pound (300 kg) precision-guided munitions at approximately 2:15 a.m. Eastern Time (0715 GMT)," said LaMarca.

A British defence official confirmed in London that Tornados warplanes had come under attack from Iraqi missiles over southern Iraq but that they had returned safely to base.

British Defence Secretary George Robertson said Britain would rigorously enforce the no-fly zones despite Iraqi mis-

sile attacks on U.S. and British warplanes. He accused Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein of displaying defiance, arrogance and weakness and denied allied aircraft were engaged in "anything provocative" in enforcing the no-fly zones and said they would not be intimidated by Iraq.

White House National Security Council spokesman Leavy also said the patrols would go on. "This is a key element of our containment policy to prevent (President) Saddam Hussein from using his aircraft to threaten his own people and his neighbours."

"We will continue to vigorously enforce it and our aircraft will take the necessary precautions to carry out their mission and defend themselves," he said.

The NCP will work for a new elections law that will increase political parties' role by allocating them a percentage of parliamentary seats," says Khalidoun Nasser, the party's spokesperson.

All in all, notwithstanding successive waves of defections that plagued the party in the first half of the year, and a string of lawsuits by disgruntled members protesting against alleged rigging in the party's internal elections, the NCP was the only party which expressed satisfaction with its own political performance during 1998.

"It was not a bad year" says Nasser.

However, he admits, the fact that the party's secretary-general, Abdul Hadi Majali, was recently elected to the prestigious and influential post of Lower House speaker, no doubt had more than a little influence on this almost positive assessment in an otherwise gloomy political milieu.

Politicians paint gloomy picture of 1998

(Continued from page 1)

But opposition leaders seem more disheartened.

"It was a bad year for political life and human rights, and there are no signs that the coming year will be any better," said Munir Hamameh, secretary-general of the Jordan Communist Party.

He noted that, earlier this month, Jordanian citizens were for the first time since the lifting of martial law, nine years ago, publicly banned from travelling to Syria for security reasons.

"Under these circumstances, the JCP considers very unlikely that we will see a new elections law or amendments to the press law in 1999," Hamameh said.

Similar views were expressed by Deputy Khalil Haddadin, secretary-general of the Jordanian Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party.

"Politically, 1998 was a bad

year, both internally and regionally, and it is ending even worse, with a suspension of the peace process and the American-British aggression against Iraq," he told the Jordan Times.

Although Haddadin, Hamameh, and other party leaders concede that the second half of the year, under the young Tarawneh government, was "a bit better" than the first half — at least in terms of democratic practices, if not from the point of view of formal and substantial reforms — expectations for more liberal and modern legislation appear low.

Analysts are warning that such widespread pessimism could lead political parties to paralysis, creating a political vacuum which would favour more extreme groups.

"Apathy and disenchantment with political parties and politics in general have increased during the past

year," one columnist told the Jordan Times.

Although neither party leaders nor government officials are willing to disclose the number of members in Jordan's 20 political parties, politicians have privately admitted that there has been a decrease in membership, partly due to lack of political party culture in a country which lived 30 years under martial laws, and partly due to parties' own inability "to deliver the goods."

"We understand that we are not doing enough, but where do we find more breathing space?" one leftist leader said in a recent interview with the Jordan Times.

"It is a vicious circle. We do not mobilise enough people, so we lose members: We lose members, therefore we can only mobilise less people," he said.

To strengthen political parties and boost their role, most

politicians have long called for a percentage of seats to be allocated to parties in a new elections law, while some hope for state funding to political parties.

The Democratic Party of the Left (DPL), which has spearheaded the campaign for a percentage of Lower House seats to be allocated to political parties, says a new elections law will top its 1999 political agenda. "We need a system that would mitigate the effects of the one-person, one-vote formula," says DPL spokesperson Jamil Nimri, leading the chorus of those accusing the current system of encouraging already strong tribalism.

In this campaign, the DPL's "strange bed fellow" could be the centre-right National Constitutional Party (NCP), which was born from the merger of nine groups in 1996 and is widely considered as one of the most affluent par-



'The A to Z of Sex'

MOSCOW (AP) — Give this much to Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the bad boy of Russian politics. Zhirinovsky took over a Moscow nightclub Sunday to unveil his new book, "The A to Z of Sex." Zhirinovsky, an extreme nationalist with a taste for the outrageous, was once considered a potentially strong candidate for president of Russia. Today, he is better known for the sort of political burlesque that he demonstrated on the packed floor of "Dolls" nightclub. "Man needs something more in life," Zhirinovsky said, explaining how he came to write about sex. "Man doesn't live for the factory whistle, nor for the machine gun fire, nor for stocks and shares, nor for revolution and reform. ... It's our nature."

Playboy beats U.S. govt in court

WILMINGTON (AP) — A three-judge panel in the U.S. state of Delaware ruled that a law requiring sexually explicit cable television channels to completely block their signals to non-subscribing households was unconstitutional. The ruling was a victory for Playboy Enterprises Inc. in its longstanding legal battle with the U.S. government over the Communications Decency Act, part of a landmark 1996 telecommunications law.

Road showered with marks

FRANKFURT (AP) — A German motorway was showered with 77,000 marks (\$46,050) worth of small change after an accident involving a security van, police said. The motorway was closed for more than an hour as police shovelled the coins off the road. Three people, including the two drivers of the van, were seriously injured in the accident near Koblenz.

Stolen lobsters to be served at elderly and blind home

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (AP) — A \$5,000 cache of stolen live Maine lobsters and frozen shrimp will end up on the New Year's Day dinner tables of 129 elderly and blind New Jersey residents, police said. "It's wonderful," said Sister Ann Taylor, director of St. Joseph's Home for the Blind, in Jersey City, N.J., of the rare fare to be enjoyed by the residents, aged 65 to 106, most of whom are on Medicare. Police said two New York City men, Michael Chapple and Dan Dove, were arrested in Jersey City by undercover detectives when they signed for the delivery of fresh-packed seafood from Maine fish markets, which they ordered with stolen credit card numbers.

Man smashes record for blowing spaghetti from nose

CARLSBAD (AP) — Kevin Cole is duly proud of smashing the world record for blowing spaghetti out of his nose — a 19-centimetre effort recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records. "It's not very often that Carlsbad gets put on the map like this," he said. Cole took the title at a Dec. 16 competition when he bested the former world record holder, Matt Welch, by 5 centimetres. Cole, 24, said he uses his tongue to push the pasta to his nasal passages. "Then you just blow," he said. "It's just like blowing your nose." His noodle of choice? Ronzoni No. 8.

Arabs should

Volume 24

accuses Saddam

of killing 5.0

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